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HOW SEGA'S AMBITIOUS SATURN GAME SOARED

THE EVOLUTION OF GOD OF WAR

THE BRUTAL TRANSFORMATION OF GAMING'S ANGRIEST ANTI-HERO

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THE MAKING OF DARK CASTLE

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE MAC CLASSIC

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MOMENT FROM THE GOD OF WAR SERIES?

DARRAN JONES

Everything about the 2018 reboot. I loved the Norse mythology, Kratos' relationship with his son Atreus and the iconic weapon reveal towards the game's end.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Resident Evil 9: Requiem*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Being one of the first in the country to complete *God Of War II* was pretty cool, and so was playing it!
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go.
Currently playing: *Star Wars Outlaws*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

ANDY SALTER

God of War: Ascension. Not because of anything in the game but I was working on *Play* magazine at the time and we were doing a cover feature on it without knowing a thing about it. Even the name was only revealed days before going to press.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

RORY MILNE

The boss fight at the start of *God Of War II* with the Colossus Of Rhodes really emphasises to me just how epic in scale the sequel is, and just how ambitious its developers were.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Exile*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

DAVID CROOKES

Battling the Hydra in the 2005 *God Of War* was nothing short of epic and it really set the tone of the game (and the series) for me.
Expertise: Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and PlayStation 2 (but is it retro? Debate!)
Currently playing: *Crash Bash*
Favourite game of all time: *Broken Sword*

ANDREW FISHER

That boss fight with the Hydra in the original *God Of War* is so memorable.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Roguecraft DX*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL DRURY

In *God of War III*, when Aphrodite pauses her threesome and asks you to, "Come in my chambers." Utter filth.
Expertise: Mouse and keyboard controls
Currently playing: *Constance*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

MARTYN CARROLL

For me it's the second game's opening boss battle against the Colossus Of Rhodes. I remember playing it and thinking, "Who even needs a PS3?"
Expertise: Spectrum stuff
Currently playing: *Wario Land*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

LOADING...

I was working on *games™* when *God Of War* first appeared, and what a commotion the game caused in the office. That opening Hydra battle blew me away, and I was as eager to play the game as everyone else was. I've played all the mainline games in the series since, with the exception of *Ragnarök* and while I found *Ascension* to be completely forgettable (albeit as polished as the previous games) I'd say that overall, Kratos' adventures are some of the best of their type to be found in gaming.

It has been fantastic then to hear about how the many games in the series came together and it has made me realise I need to boot up the PlayStation 5 and finally take *Raganarök* for a spin.

Outside of *God Of War*, this premium issue is packed with retro goodness, including a double-sided poster featuring two classic Nintendo series and a 32-page book filled with essential Amiga games. We also look at *Dizzy*'s first full-price adventure, take to the skies in *LHX Attack Chopper* and talk to Phil King about the many magazines he's worked on.

We've Ultimate Guides on *R-Type III* and *Panzer Dragoon*, chat to Jonathan Dunn about *RoboCop*'s excellent score and get our hands on the brand-new Commodore 64 Ultimate.

There's plenty more to enjoy in this issue, but I'll let you discover it for yourself.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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Palace Software's sequel had Darran so excited that he made special plans to play it

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Tim didn't enjoy working in a factory, but he did enjoy bonding over multiplayer games of this Mega Drive classic

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Brent Iverson returns to his ambitious helicopter simulator that he made whilst working at Electronic Arts

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Darran loves Sega's Saturn and he also loves shmups, so this list was somewhat inevitable. Do you agree with his final picks though?

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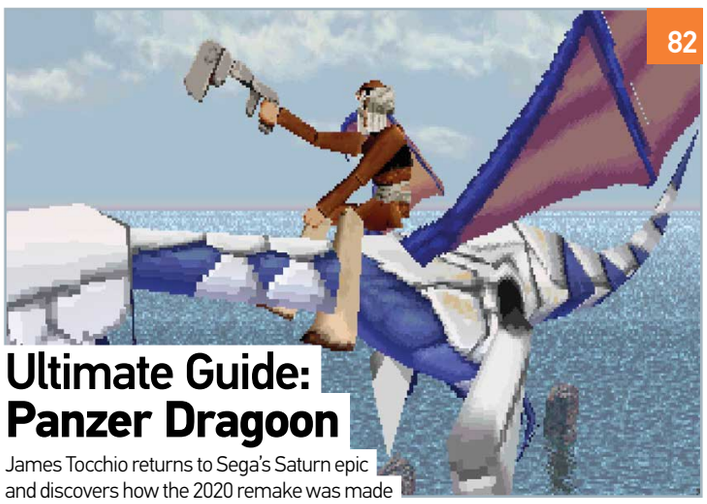

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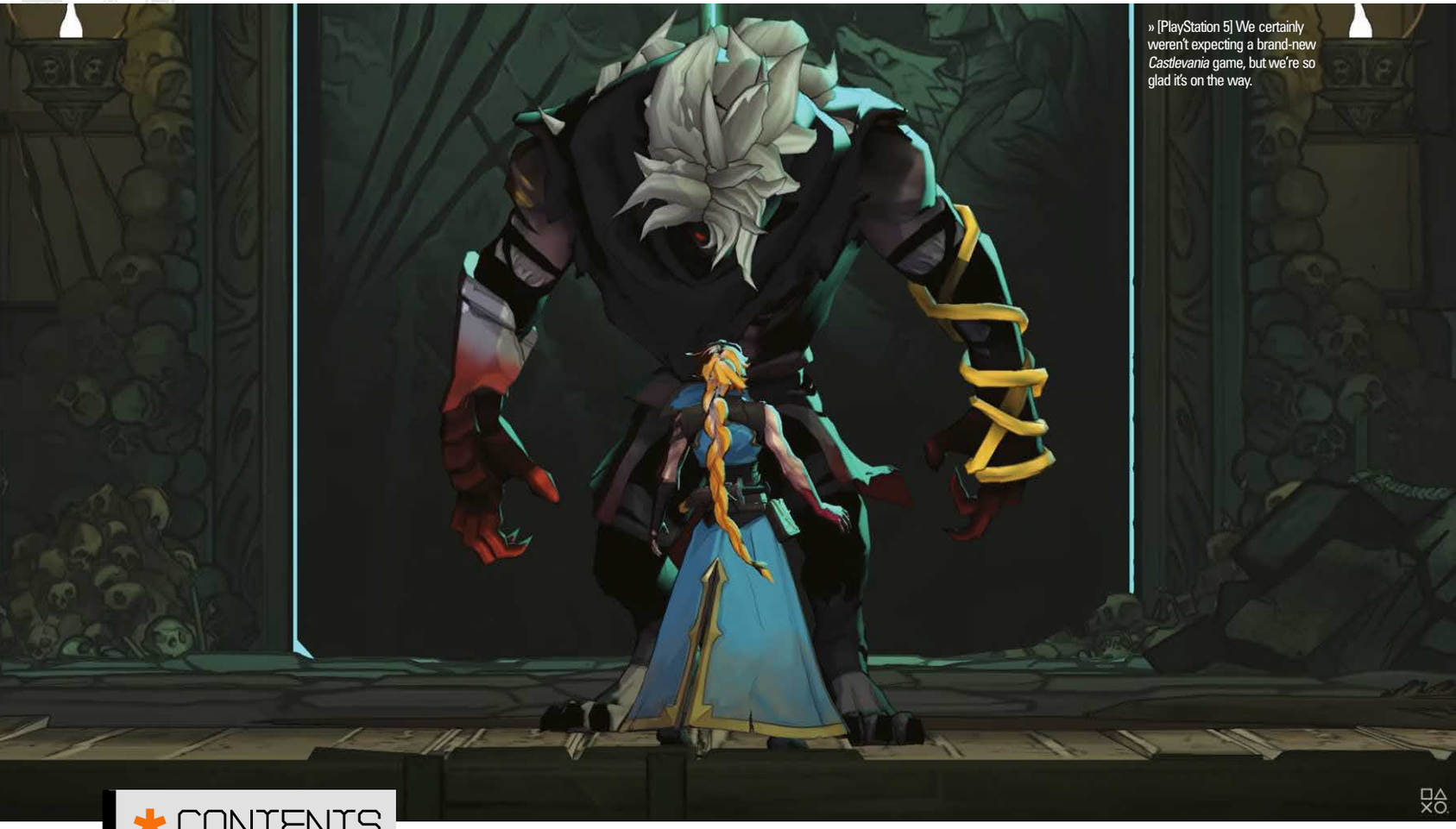
Ultimate Guide: Panzer Dragoon

James Tocchio returns to Sega's Saturn epic and discovers how the 2020 remake was made



» [PlayStation 5] We certainly weren't expecting a brand-new *Castlevania* game, but we're so glad it's on the way.

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All the great retro-related games announced at Sony's recent State Of Play show

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Martyn continues to barrel the DeLorean towards the end of the era. Next stop, October 2009

THE STATE OF RETRO

Sony reveals a bevy of retro-related games

Words by Darran Jones

Although Nintendo beat Sony to the punch with an early February Direct that showcased many games that would be heading to the Switch 2 for the rest of the year, Sony ended up delivering the killer blow for retro fans.

Virtually the entire show was steeped in nostalgia thanks to brand-new games connected to existing franchises, or the return of old favourites being remastered.

» Typical. You wait ages for a new *Metal Gear Solid* remaster, then three come along at once.

Needless to say, we are already preparing to blow the dust off our PS5.

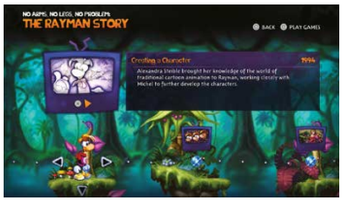
Konami in particular was in fine form showing off some fantastic games. *Silent Hill: Townfall* is looking exceptionally creepy and is being developed by the Glasgow-based Screen Burn Interactive. Equally compelling is a brand-new *Castlevania* game from Motion Twin (*Dead Cells*) and Evil Empire (*The Rogue Prince Of Persia*). The two studios have already worked on *Castlevania* DLC for *Dead Cells* so this new game seems like a perfect match.

> "Sony finished things off with two big announcements, both focussing on its God Of War series"

The final offering from Konami was the news that *Metal Gear Solid 4* has finally sneaked off of the PS3 and is due to appear in a brand-new compilation. *Metal Gear Solid Master Collection Volume 2* will include *MGS4* as well as the PSP epic *Peace Walker* and the Game Boy Color classic *Ghost Babel*. It's a solid collection of games and we're hoping it greatly improves on the original compilation which contained a few emulation issues. All of Konami's games are planned for this year.

Konami wasn't the only developer with a new vampire game, as Crystal Dynamics

» [PlayStation 5] *Silent Hill: Townfall* is looking excellent. Here's hoping its story is a similar quality to *Silent Hill Fs*.



» [PlayStation 5] After getting stuck into Rory's great *Rayman* feature last month, we're looking forward to this new documentary.

revealed that two *Legacy Of Kain* games are on the way. A remaster of *Legacy Of Kain Defiance* is planned and while it was largely expected due to last year's *Soul Reaver* games, the fact it will include a playable demo of a previously unannounced game is pretty big news. Equally big is the reveal of *Legacy Of Kain: Ascendance* by Freakzone Games, which is due in late-March and will feature PS1-styled visuals (keeping it in line with the early games in the series.

***Dead Or Alive 6: Last Round* was revealed by Koei Tecmo and will be a definitive edition of the game, similar to the previously released *Dead Or Alive 5: Last Round*.** It also announced that a brand-new game was in development for the PlayStation 5 to tie in with the franchise's 30th anniversary. Will it be *Dead Or Alive 7* or a compilation of past games?

» [PlayStation 5] An update of *Dead Or Alive 6* isn't the most exciting reveal, but news of a brand-new game certainly is.

Other interesting announcements from the show was the news that numerous *Tenchu* developers are working on a new ninja stealth game called *Yakoh Shinobi Ops*. It appears to be co-op-focussed and looks like it's going to be very decent. We'd have loved a proper *Tenchu* game, but we'll happily settle for this.

Star Wars: Galactic Racer is another game that's on our radar. It looks like it will be taking a leaf out of the *Burnout* book by delivering intense, combat-based racing in a number of familiar *Star Wars* locations. Let's just hope it doesn't take any inspiration from *Star Wars: Super Bombad Racing*…

Although it was hinted at by Michel Ancel in last month's *Rayman* article, Ubisoft finally officially revealed its new *Rayman* remaster. The game is already out and includes an immersive documentary and the ability to play a SNES prototype. You'll find a review of it elsewhere within this issue.

Sony finished things off with two big announcements, both focussing on its *God Of War* series. The biggest surprise was the shadow drop of *God Of War: Sons Of Sparta* by the popular indie developer Mega Cat Studios. It's a Metroidvania, features a great 2D art style and is 100% cannon (the story was carefully crafted by scribes at Santa Monica Studios). It's arrived a little too late for us to review, so we'll hopefully cover it in the next issue.

The other *God Of War* news was the announcement that the first three games in the series are being remade. There's no news on how extensive these remakes will be, or which developer will be working on them. (We'd have made a guess at Bluepoint but just seen the news it had been shuttered as we went to press.)

Needless to say you can expect more news and even reviews of all the games we've covered in later issues. ✱

» [PlayStation 5] *God Of War: Sons Of Sparta* looks like a tremendously fun game. A review is planned for our next issue.

SEGA MANIA TURNS TEN

The fan-produced magazine dedicated to all things Sega will be celebrating its tenth issue shortly. Available from sega-mania.com for £9.99, the new issue will sport a special cover by Wil Overton and feature over 100 pages. In terms of reviews, the issue will look at games from 1996 onwards and will include a complete guide to Saturn peripherals and all of Sega's online services and much more.

DOWNED DINOS

Limited Run Games recently revealed that its collection of *Jurassic Park* games is to be delisted on 31 March after just over two years on release. The seven-game collection covered a number of SNES, NES and Mega Drive games based on the hit 1993 movie. Fortunately, physical copies of the game do exist on systems like the Switch and PS5, but this is another example of the dangers of embracing digital media.

Who is Mike Mika?
Mike Mika's official videogame career began in the Nineties, working on Game Boy Color titles like *Klax* and *Alice In Wonderland*. He's now the studio head of Digital Eclipse, a studio acclaimed for its reverential treatment of classic games.

Alignment

Over the holiday break I did what apparently 20,000 other middle-aged folks like me did: I unboxed my new Commodore 64 Ultimate, the modern-day re-release of my first home computer.

I own more Commodore 64 hardware than any reasonable person should. I still have my original 'breadbin'. I emulate the C64 on devices like my iPhone that would have seemed like absolute science fiction in 1986. I've professionally developed commercial games inspired by the C64 and its software. I can discuss sprite multiplexing and raster interrupts at parties to the point of placing my marriage at risk. But I wasn't prepared for what this machine would unlock.

What surprised me most wasn't the hardware. It was how quickly it pulled me back in time. I hooked up my original 1541 floppy drive and slid in a disk that hadn't spun up in nearly 40 years. The drive head knocked back and forth in that unmistakable 1541 way – loud and guttural. Not only could I load my old floppies, but I could finally back them up. Preserve them.

For decades I'd kept hundreds of floppies boxed in my garage. Not properly catalogued. Not backed up. Just saved. I told myself I'd start by preserving a few important ones, such as the disks with titles like "My game!" that might contain a half-finished masterpiece. Instead, a full-on excavation began.

Reviving 40-year-old floppies takes patience and low expectations. You don't know whether you're about to uncover a treasure or discover a corrupted disk. But when a directory listing appears, it's like dusting sand off a fossil and recognising fragments of something that lived a long time ago.

There were the games my friends and I never finished. We always built from the front: dramatic loading screen, title screen, attract mode. By the time we got around to implementing the actual gameplay, we'd lose steam. Archaeology confirmed this. I was a prolific architect of beginnings. Rarely did I finish anything.

But deeper in the strata were the real artefacts: backups of our family Bulletin Board System we called Spiritech. My dad ran it. It was his favourite thing in the world. It wasn't a religious reference; we just liked the word 'Spirit', as in ghosts in the machine.

> "Part of me wishes he could have sat beside me while the 1541 clattered away"

And there they were: the ghosts. Message threads from the mid-Eighties Metro Detroit micro computer scene. Flame wars quarantined to 'War Boards'. Game reviews written out of love, not outrage. User call-in logs from area codes that don't exist anymore. Usernames belonging to people who don't exist anymore. A moment in time preserved in iron oxide and magnetic mylar.

I hadn't expected how intense that would feel. Reading those posts wasn't a nostalgic trip. Nostalgia looks back. This felt closer than that. It felt like I was there.

Then I found my own work. Science fiction and fantasy stories written in obtuse word processor formats, hundreds of hand-animated sprites of ninjas and barbarians. Apparently my early creative pillars lived somewhere between broadswords and throwing stars, which explains more about me than I'm prepared to unpack here.

The deeper I dug, the clearer it became: this wasn't about reliving the past. It was about recalibrating to it. Seeing who I was at 12, 13, 14 - prolific, earnest, wildly unstructured – and recognising a throughline.

My dad saved every disk instead of tossing them, little time capsules for a future version of me. He passed away a few years ago, and as I backed up disk after disk – the boards he moderated, the files he curated, the conversations he had – I kept thinking how much he would have loved watching it all come back to life. That BBS era was one of the happiest periods of his life. I saw him most energised then: building community, solving software and hardware problems, welcoming strangers into our strange little corner of computing.

Part of me wishes he could have sat beside me while the 1541 clattered away. But in a quiet way, he had arranged that visit decades ago. Every disk was proof. He had saved those years for me. Saved the conversations. Saved the unfinished games. Saved the wide-eyed version of me. When I finished exploring the last floppy, I didn't feel sad. I felt reintroduced.

Reacquainted with the part of me that builds things just to see if they can exist. The kid who started with the loading screen because the promise of what was to come felt limitless. No, this wasn't nostalgia. It was recognition – of where the spark first caught, and why I'm still chasing it. *

Do you agree with Mike's thoughts? Contact us at:

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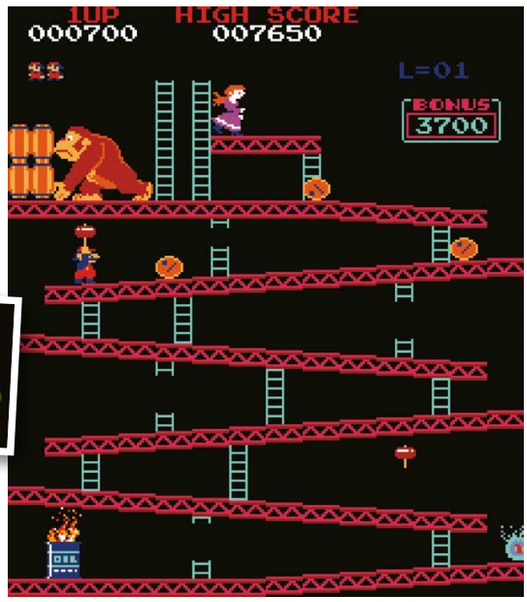
KINGS OF KONG

ARCADE CLUB TO HOST NEW DONKEY KONG CHAMPIONSHIP

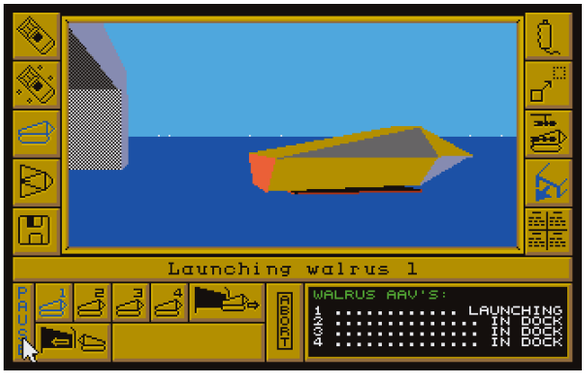
The first UK Kong Off will be held at Arcade Club Bury on 3 May and promises to be a great event for all visitors of the arcade. Hosted by Retro Russ and 8BitBoyUK, the event is planned to cater for 32 players and will be held across several rounds. Arcade Club is providing eight *Donkey Kong* arcade machines and the first round of play is expected to last four hours, with the next round seeing 16 players battle it out across a two-hour window.

Each player will be given an hour and unlimited credits to get their best score during the two rounds and the top eight scoring players will make it through to the final round which is due to finish at 8:30pm. The final round will give each remaining player three hours each to score as many points as possible, and the organisers are hoping for potential kill screens as the day continues.



» [Arcade] Could you become the King Of Kong? Sign up for the UK Kong Off and find out.

The event itself is sponsored by Arcade Parts UK, Antstream and Bitmap Books, who will all be donating voucher prizes to the event. If you fancy yourself as a King Of Kong you can sign up to the event by visiting bit.ly/kongoff26



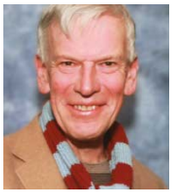
» [Atari ST] Graeme Baird's skills with 3D-based games could be seen in titles like the ground-breaking *Carrier Command*.

» [C64] *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* was a big hit for Audiogenic and led to an Emlyn-themed sports quiz.

LOST GAMING LEGENDS

TWO TALENTED INDUSTRY VETERANS HAVE SADLY PASSED

We've been made aware by freelancer Richard Hewison that two industry veterans have recently passed away. Peter Calver, the cofounder of Audiogenic Software, passed away on 19 January after a short illness. Audiogenic was best known for its many sports titles, which included *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* and various *Brian Lara* cricket games. Peter was also responsible for cofounding ELSPA (Entertainment And Leisure Software Publishers Association) which is now known as Ukie, and more recently, started Lost Cousins, a popular website designed to put relatives in touch.



» Peter Calver cofounded Audiogenic Software and ELSPA and more recently created the website lostcousins.com

It was announced on 25 January that Graeme Baird, a pioneer of 3D games and one of the cofounders of Realtime Games Software, had passed after an undisclosed illness. Graeme was an extremely talented programmer and was involved with a number of important early 3D games, including *3D Starstrike* and *Carrier Command*. He would later work for companies like Vektor Grafix, Codemasters and Sony where he worked on games such as *Colin McRae Rally* and *Sackboy: A Big Adventure*. Our thoughts go out to all of Peter and Graeme's friends and family at this difficult time.

CULD CALLING

City Connection has announced plans to port the original *Culdcept* to modern systems. Debuting on the Saturn in 1997, Omiyasoft's series has rarely made it to the West (the first was *Culdcept Saga* in 2006) so we're intrigued to see how the card-based game mechanics hold up. A brand-new game in the series, *Culdcept BEGINS* (pictured) is also planned for later in the year and will feature online play.

VETERANS LEAVE NINTENDO

Hensuke Tanabe, a longtime Nintendo veteran, recently revealed he will be retiring from the company. The news came after he spoke to Nintendo Dream while promoting *Metroid Prime 4: Beyond*. Past works include *Super Mario Bros 2* and *Link's Awakening*. Hideki Konno, who has worked on everything from *Yoshi's Island* to *Luigi's Mansion* (pictured) is also leaving Nintendo. It's currently unknown if he too is retiring.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

This way and that

I am a very poor traveller. I get motion sickness very easily. If I'm in a car, all I can do is look forward. I can't read a book, can't look at my phone, can't do anything like that, WHICH IS PROBABLY FOR THE BEST WHEN I AM DRIVING!!!! LOLLERS ROFL.

I am of course talking about when I am a passenger. The thing is, I always forget this and start checking TikTok and whatnot as I'm being driven around. After five minutes, I'm having to turn on the AC, open the window and hold my grey face in my hands moaning. There's a bit when I first came out of the jungle on *I'm A Celebrity* where I'm being driven to the hotel and have to get out and crouch on my own for a while looking like I'm about to chuck. The show made it out that I was too emotional to travel and had to spend some time on my own when the reality was they kept making me watch clips in the back of a people carrier and I just couldn't take it.

This motion sickness also happens in other situations. VR is the main culprit. I love virtual reality. If I was medically able to, I would spend my entire life in the Metaverse. Unfortunately, ANY movement in ANY direction has me sweating like a sweaty thing and having to sit down and weep. When I feel a bit better after about 15 minutes, guess what I do? Yeah, I TRY AGAIN! The definition of insanity is trying the same thing over and over and expecting different results. I will never learn.

I heard someone mention *Perfect Dark* the other day and I really fancied playing it. I had my Rare best of disc for the Xbox (more on that next month kids) and saw it was on there. I loaded it up and boom, I was in.

It looked a little dated, these things often do, but it was kind of charming because of it. Shooting those guards in the old doo dah will never not be funny. The clutching of the groin, the slow sink to the floor – marvellous stuff. I got a little lost quite early on and could not work out where I had to go. I'm running this way and that way, up stairs and down stairs. Then it happened – I felt that familiar rise of sweat, a little tiny trail of vomit entered my throat and my head started throbbing. How the hell was I getting motion sick playing *Perfect Dark*? I had to bin it. In fact I think that's what happened when it first came out on the Nintendo 64. That traumatic memory is coming back as I type these sad words.

I've tried everything. Eating ginger nuts (steady), drinking ginger tea, having a fan on, wearing a copper bracelet. None of it works. Is there a cure for this malady? And if not, am I entitled to a blue badge? *

> "Shooting those guards in the old doo dah will never not be funny"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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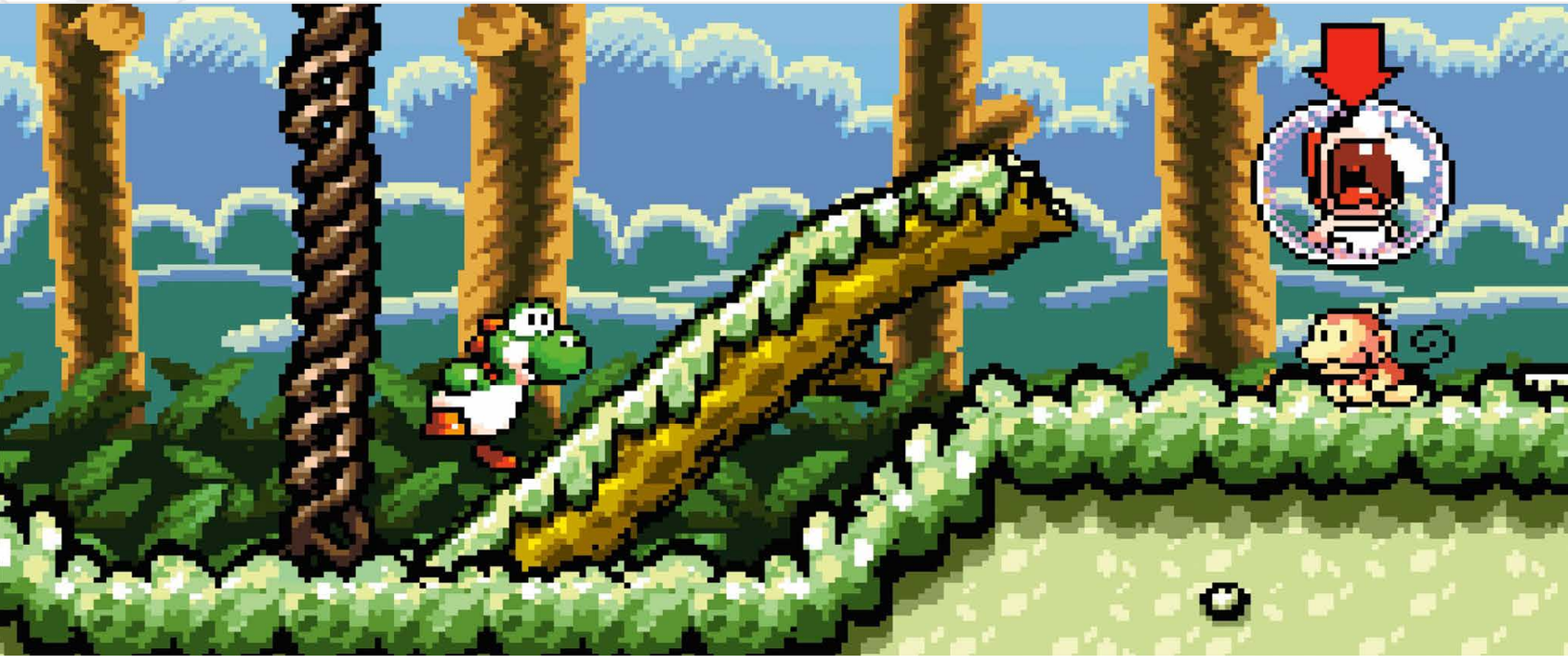
Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.



Handing over control

Being incredibly old now, I am a grandfather, and I have two excellent grandsons. I award them both full grandson points, with only one slight mark knocked off due to the fact that every time I see them I come down with some horrible illness. So far, I've avoided head lice, but the eldest starts school in September, so it's only a matter of time.

I'm writing this because – yes – I am ill following our latest visit. No, no; you can hold your sympathy. I don't want any. I'll find a way to soldier through this most difficult of times on my own.

So, they're four and not-quite-two – unusual names, granted, but such is the modern way – and we were up there recently for the eldest's birthday. He'd asked for a remote control robot, and – being The World's Best Grandparents – we duly provided.

As most remote control things seem to do these days, it came with a vaguely PlayStation-esque controller. When did that happen? Have you noticed that? Most remote control things – at least, the cheaper ones – have all ripped-off gaming controllers.

As far as I know, he has yet to play a videogame, but somehow… he knows EXACTLY how to hold and use a joypad. We didn't have to show him – he just ripped it out of the box, and a second later his robot was stomping around, doing dances, and – when left alone for more than ten seconds – lamenting, "Why does everyone ignore me? My life sucks." That's not even a joke: it's the most insecure, needy, robot I've ever known.

Anyway, where has that joypad-knowledge come from? Do kids now just sort of absorb that information? Was it passed down to him from me, via his mother? Does a genetic memory of *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* in some way reside within him?!

It made me realise that I've got to introduce him to games before too long. I've been thinking a lot about a plan a friend of mine told me about many years ago, that when she had kids she was going to introduce them to games in the order that SHE encountered them.

I don't know if that ever happened, but her plan was to start with the NES, work through the SNES, then gradually move to next-gen systems. I can see the appeal – being able to share a love of *A Link To The Past* with your own offspring.

I'm not sure it'd work if I went all the way back to my first days with games. I can't see any modern kid – he's already being raised on a diet of *Bluey*, *Transformers* and tractor videos – that'd be impressed by *Pitfall!* or *Combat*.

But I can see some logic in skipping ahead to the SNES. As much as anything, I want to see if his generation will just inherently 'get' games, in the way he somehow understood how to control a depressive, co-dependent, robot. I might start him off on *Yoshi's Island* next time I see him. I'll be sure to keep you posted. *

> "Being incredibly old now, I am a grandfather, and I have two excellent grandsons"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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SECRET MODE

» A giant *Pac-Man* stands ready for visitors to compete for the day's highest score.

» Here's Damir Šlogar, the museum's founder posing alongside *Computer Space*.

Video Game History Museum

Zagreb's retro-gaming paradise is a must-see amongst the Croatian capital's attractions

Words by Mike Diver

Located in central Zagreb, the Video Game History Museum fills its three floors with a wealth of software showcases, playable games and hardware displays. Open since summer 2025, it's become one of the city's highest-rated attractions. We speak to its founder, gaming industry veteran Damir Šlogar.

You've had a varied career, having worked on handheld and mobile games and founding Big Blue Bubble Inc in the early Noughties. What made you want to establish this museum, and how quickly did it come together?

The idea came partially from me setting up displays at home. I'd been thinking about doing something like this for about ten years – and once I made the decision, the process took about a year and a half. A year of that was finding this place – this all used to be apartments, and we rebuilt everything from scratch. But even now, I've not emptied half of my personal collection from containers, and we're full here.

You have over 3,000 items in the museum. How many of them are yours?

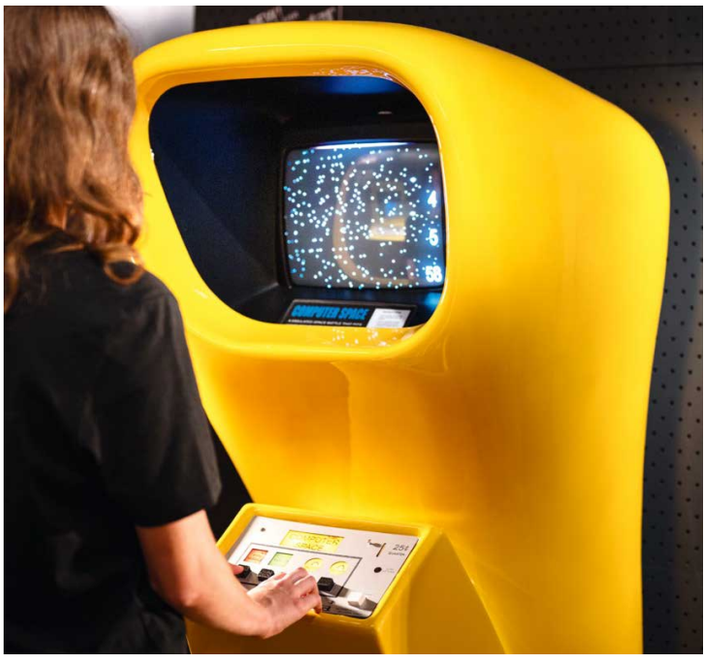
About 100%, actually. Very close to, at least. There are a couple of arcade machines that are not mine, which we purchased for the museum. *Computer Space* is one of those. But everything else is from my own collection.

> "People are realising just how important these games were in a pop-culture context, and the emotions they stir"
>
> **DAMIR ŠLOGAR**

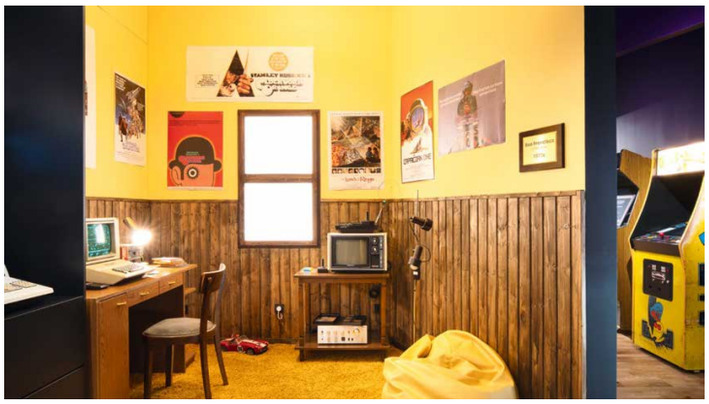
And which exhibits do you feel separate this museum from others like it, elsewhere in the world?

The whole Seventies exhibit is something visitors say they're impressed by. Many later-released things, they've probably seen before, in some way. But a lot of the Seventies items were simply unavailable in Europe. People here didn't have *Computer Space*. We have an original *Pong* here, too, as well as the reproduction of *Tennis For Two*. A lot of these things, visitors are seeing in person for the first time.

Video Game History Museum photos by: Marko Mihaljević



» The reproduction of *Computer Space* is playable, but the original arcade machine is kept behind glass.



» A themed Seventies display showcases an Atari VCS and Apple II with period-appropriate posters.

» The entrance features *Tennis For Two* and *Computer Space* reproductions.

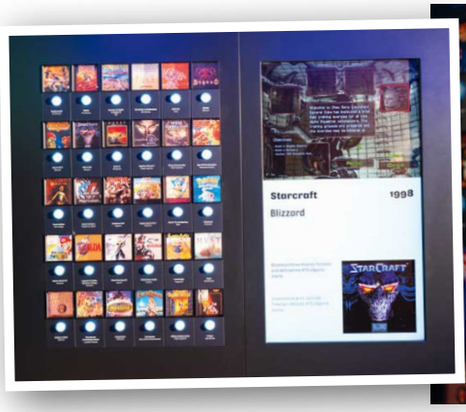
» A bedroom display pits two 8-bit greats against each other: the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64.

There's a lot to play here, from arcade machines to several consoles. But there's also things visitors aren't meant to touch, like *Tennis For Two*. Is it a challenge, keeping people's sticky mitts off this stuff?
I toured a lot of other videogame museums, and we really didn't want all of our exhibits to be behind glass. I don't want this to feel too much like a museum, if that makes sense. We did hear horror stories about other places leaving things unprotected, but our visitors generally respect our exhibits, and we're happy with how the equipment is being handled. We did have to put our Virtual Boys beneath glass however, as that's a very sensitive console. But not all consoles are easy to emulate, so you need to have original hardware available. We have a playable Vectrex, because you can't really emulate that system on modern LCD screens. It's not a Vectrex to me unless it's on a CRT.

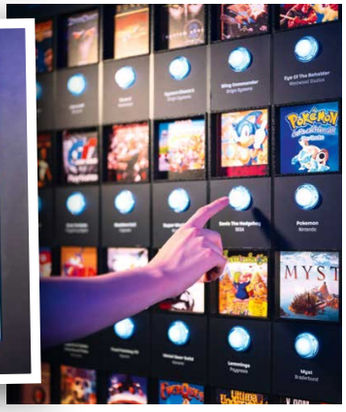
It's great to see lesser-sighted systems here, like a Gizmondo handheld and a whole cabinet dedicated to the Amiga CD32. But there are some absentees. You have a Neo Geo CD on show but not an AES – does that mean there's still plans to add more items?
What's in the museum now, it's only about 20% of what we could show – and the archive on the third floor only features a fraction of what we could have up there. There's so much in storage still. So yes, there may be small changes to exhibits in the future, but I'd say we're most of the way there, to what we want to have on show.

And what about expanding further, perhaps increasing the size of the museum to accommodate more displays?
That is not the plan. This space is already very big for a museum of its type, and we're limited by a lot of things. We have to be in the centre of town – we could get a bigger space but we'd be further out, and therefore more of a challenge for tourists to get to. But perhaps we could open another museum somewhere else, for different exhibits? That could be something, five years from now.

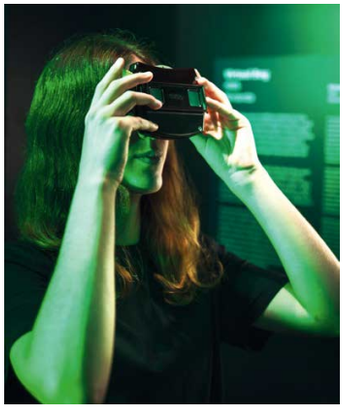
This is still a very new attraction in Zagreb, but it's already highly rated (at the time of writing the museum is number one on Trip Advisor's list of things to do in the city). Where have your visitors been coming from?
All around the world, with a lot from North America. And we have so many repeat visitors, which is very unusual for a museum. We've started doing marketing outside of Croatia, such as in Korea, so we're starting to see tourists arriving in Zagreb with a visit to this place in mind. I think, fairly soon, we'll be the place to come to when you visit Zagreb. I wanted to set something up where anyone, whatever their experience of videogames, could find something interesting. And we're getting there. From a wider cultural perspective, I want to make sure everyone knows about us, and we are seeing it – people are realising just how important these games were in a pop-culture context, and the emotions they stir in visitors are so strong, even in those who don't consider themselves to be a gamer. ✱



» At the end of each section, visitors can vote for the period's most influential game.



» Would you vote for *Sonic The Hedgehog* as the most influential game of the Nineties?



» Due to the Virtual Boy's delicate design, visitors can experience its 3D visuals using a viewer.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

OCTOBER 2009 – As the nights draw in and the weather takes a turn, there's no better time of the year to clock up some gaming hours. And there are plenty of great new releases available. Join Martyn Carroll as he rounds up this month's gaming news

» [PlayStation 3] Despite a lot of prerelease hype, *Uncharted 2* really did deserve the build-up. For many fans it remains the best game in the series.

NEWS OCTOBER 2009

After two years of global recession, compounded by the 2008 financial crisis, the International Monetary Fund raised its growth forecast for 2010, saying that the world's economy was recovering faster than expected. "Financial markets are healing," said the IMF's Olivier Blanchard, before adding a note of caution. "The current numbers should not fool governments into thinking that the crisis is over."

One result of the financial crisis was that it forced Honda's Formula One team to quit the sport in 2008. The team was bought out by Brit Ross Brawn who formed Brawn GP with Jenson Button and Rubens Barrichello as its drivers. In a true underdog story, the team dominated the 2009 season and on 18 October, at the Brazilian Grand Prix, Brawn GP won the Constructors' Championship and Button bagged the Drivers' Championship. It's believed that Brawn's unlikely triumph was the inspiration for Apple's *F1* movie.

On October 9, US president Barack Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for efforts towards diplomacy and nuclear disarmament. Some critics claimed it was awarded prematurely, as Obama was a mere eight months into his presidency at the time.

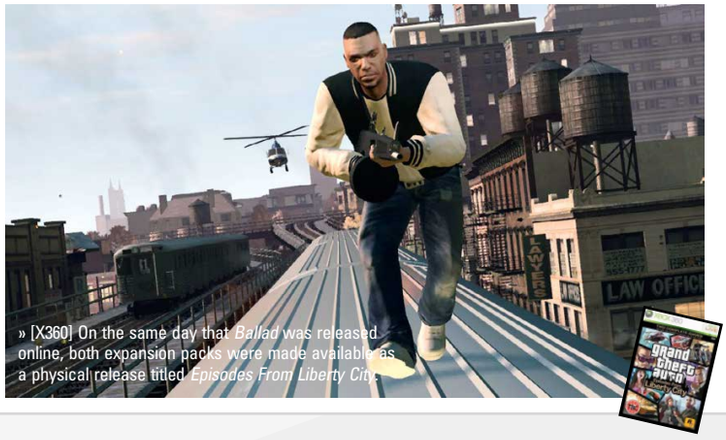
THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 2009

This month saw a key battle of the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 generation play out. The first bomb was dropped on 13 October, when do-no-wrong Sony studio Naughty Dog released the PS3 exclusive *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*. As it had done previously with the second *Crash Bandicoot* and *Jak And Daxter* games, Naughty Dog took a winning formula and refined it into something exceptional.

The sequel added a bunch of multiplayer modes, but it was the single-player game with those cinematic setpieces that really shone. Critically, it was immediately hailed as a PS3 masterpiece: 9/10 from *Edge* and *games™*, 10/10 from *Official PlayStation Magazine* and 96% from *Play* (editor Nick Jones called it, "One of the best and most important games of this generation.") *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* would go on to become the most critically acclaimed game of the year with a Metacritic score of 96/100.

Xbox fired back with a salvo of its own. Hitting Xbox Live on 29 October was the second serving of *Grand Theft Auto IV* DLC, *The Ballad Of Gay Tony*. As with the first expansion pack, it was a 360 timed exclusive (cue flashbacks to Peter Moore and his dodgy *GTA IV* tattoo), meaning that PS3 and PC owners would have to wait until April 2010 to play them. Despite being another short story expansion, *GTA* remained a critical darling and *Ballad* was awarded 9/10 from both *X360* and *games™* magazines (the latter, referencing it being the game's final DLC offering, called it, "A fitting end to the saga.") The same week saw a double helping of more good news for 360 owners. First up was the release of *Tekken 6*, which was the first home-console entry in Namco's long-running series that wasn't 'Only On PlayStation'. Also spinning in was the 360 exclusive *Forza Motorsport 3* from Turn 10, which earned praise for adding a little more 'fun' to its trademark simulation leanings. *X360* awarded Turn 10's game 9/10 and downplayed Sony's *Gran Turismo*, calling it, "Gaming's most authentic racing experience. Fact."

Outside of the first-party stuff and the timed deals there were



» [X360] On the same day that *Ballad* was released online, both expansion packs were made available as a physical release titled *Episodes From Liberty City*.

» The PSP Go was styled more like a smartphone. The lack of disc support hampered take up, however.

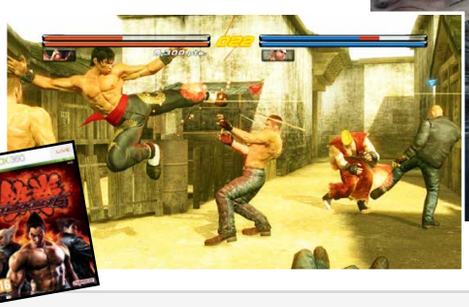
» [Xbox 360] For motorsport fans seeking more realism in their racing, *Forza 3* was highly recommended by reviewers.

» [PSP] *Gran Turismo* featured hundreds of cars – it's just a shame only four could race at any one time.

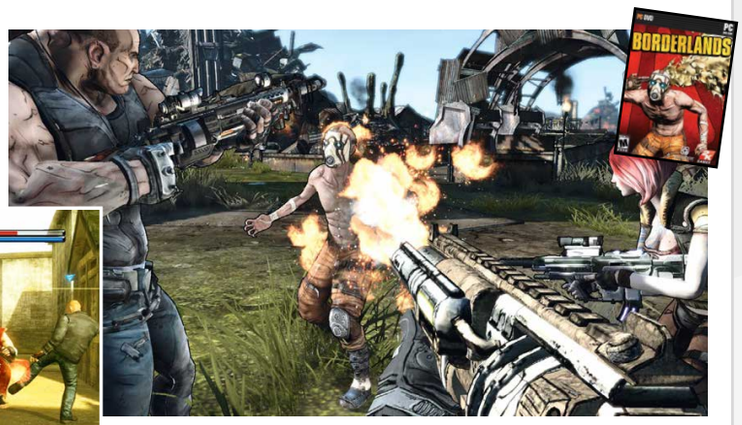
a couple of key multiformat releases this month. Gearbox's brand-new IP *Borderlands* landed on 20 October and was well received, earning 8/10s from many publications. The game popularised looter-shooters and would go on to spawn its own popular franchise. Also arriving was *Brütal Legend* from Double Fine, the action RPG that marked the epic team up of Tim Schafer and Jack Black. The critics' response was similar to *Borderlands*, though slightly lower with some 7/10s in the mix. As it was the month of Halloween, there were some horror-themed games spooking up the schedule, including *Saw: The Video Game* for multiple platforms, and *Ju-On: The Grudge* for the Wii. Both were pretty ghastly – and not in a good way. Faring slightly better was the PSP version of Atari's *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*.

Speaking of the PSP, October saw the release of the PSP Go. This was the handheld's fourth iteration and the first to introduce a radical change to its appearance – it was smaller, lighter and the screen now slid up to reveal the controls. The Go was a smart little device, but there was controversy over the decision to ditch the UMD drive – this baby was digital download only. It was a bold, forward-thinking move by Sony, but it didn't land too well, especially as it was priced above all expectations at £225. Some retailers even refused to stock it. There was better news on the software front as Sony lined up some strong releases to support the launch. The key title was the loooong-awaited PSP version of *Gran Turismo* which was the perfect title to show off the handheld's visuals on its nice, bright screen. There were compromises however, with the main one being the number of rival racers was capped at three. The other big PSP release was *Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars*, an update of the Nintendo DS spin-off released earlier in the year. It proved to be an excellent port, earning review scores just shy of those of *Uncharted 2*.

Join us next time as we focus on November 2009 and the arrival of two of the biggest AAA sequels of the year. And more Mario. ✱



» [Xbox 360] *Tekken 6* introduced the Scenario Campaign, a brawler mode where players kick Mishima Zaibatsu goons in the head.



» [PC] After a drawn out development period, *Borderlands* delivered the goods when it finally debuted in October 2009.

CHARTS

OCTOBER 2009

XBOX 360

1 – **FIFA 10** (EA)
2 – **Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising** (Codemasters)
3 – **Halo: ODST** (Microsoft)
4 – **Need For Speed: Shift** (EA)
5 – **Colin McRae: Dirt 2** (Codemasters)

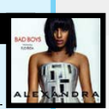
PS3

1 – **FIFA 10** (EA)
2 – **Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising** (Codemasters)
3 – **Need For Speed: Shift** (EA)
4 – **Batman: Arkham Asylum** (Eidos)
5 – **Infamous** (Sony)

WII

1 – **Wii Fit** (Nintendo)
2 – **Wii Sport Resort** (Nintendo)
3 – **Mario Kart Wii** (Nintendo)
4 – **Guitar Hero 5** (Activision)
5 – **The Beatles: Rock Band** (MTV Games)

MUSIC



1 – **Bad Boys** (Alexandra Burke ft Flo Rida)
2 – **Bodies** (Robbie Williams)
3 – **Oopsy Daisy** (Chipmunk)
4 – **Break Your Heart** (Taio Cruz and Ludacris)
5 – **Empire State Of Mind** (Jay-Z ft Alicia Keys)

THIS MONTH IN...

PC Gamer

The future of gaming is predicted. Apparently, in 2025, "Scientists figure out how to integrate virtuality with conscious experience." We're not there yet, but those boffins need to hurry, because by 2033, nanobots will be able to embed *Mario* games in your brain…

Edge

"With well over 6,000 games already on the App Store, it's getting harder to find something worth spending your cash on." *Edge* feels the pain of iPhone/iPod Touch owners and helps by shortlisting the best 50 games. The revelation – you could buy all 50 for just £73.

NGamer

Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles producer Kentaro Noguchi muses about nailing the perfect headshot. "We have been exploring the way a head explodes. We have accumulated a few patterns and this is an accumulation of our head-explosion knowledge." Lovely.

SCO
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Cauldron II: The Pumpkin Strikes Back

TAKING THE PLUNGE

» **AMSTRAD CPC 464** » **1986** » **PALACE SOFTWARE**

I don't know why, but I never played the original *Cauldron* on release. I was aware of it of course and had seen reviews in magazines, but I didn't know anybody that owned it. With that in mind, it makes no sense that I would go ahead and buy the sequel, but that's exactly what I did.

Cauldron II first caught my attention in *Amstrad Action*. I don't remember the score exactly, but I do recall it was a good one, and it may even have received an AA Rave. It was bright and colourful and the images made it pop off the pages of the magazine. Being the owner of a green-screen monitor I was used to having my games look drab and unexciting, so whenever anything appeared with an overload of colour, it immediately grabbed my attention.

I started saving any spare money I could and eventually managed to pick up a copy of the game. But I wanted my first play of it to be special. When I was a youngster I used to love visiting my grandparents, not just because they meant the world to me, but also because they had a colour TV in their bedroom and I was allowed to use it whenever I visited.

Even though a visit to their house was still two weeks away, I refused to play my new game. I wanted my first experience of it to be every bit as impactful as when I looked at those images in *Amstrad Action*. It had cost me a lot of money and it needed to feel special.

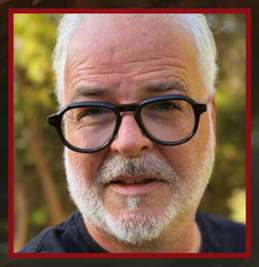
The big day finally arrived and after tea, I was able to set up my CPC and play *Cauldron II*, and wow, it did not disappoint. *Cauldron II* is a wonderfully vibrant game, with superb-looking sprites, an interesting castle to explore and plenty of spooky enemies to avoid or kill. Your constantly bouncing pumpkin is a bit of a pain to control at first, but I soon got into a good rhythm and spent the rest of the evening exploring the huge castle.

The kicker here though, is that when I arrived home and booted up the game, it still looked pretty decent on my humble green-screen monitor. Sure, it didn't pop like before, but everything was still clear to see and I had no problem getting back into the game. Maybe I shouldn't have waited after all… ✱

THE EVOLUTION OF GOD OF WAR®

INSPIRED BY THE ANCIENT GREECE OF HOLLYWOOD MOVIES, AND WITH NEW REMAKES OF THE FIRST THREE GAMES PLANNED, GOD OF WAR COMBINED BLOODY COMBAT WITH PLATFORMING, PUZZLING AND A RICH NARRATIVE. ITS UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS ENSURED AN EPIC RUN OF SEQUELS, AS SERIES CREATIVES TIM MOSS AND STIG ASMUSSEN EXPLAIN

WORDS BY RORY MILNE



» Tim Moss was technical director on many *God Of War* titles, he most recently worked at Meta.

» Stig Asmussen had a number of roles on multiple *God Of War* projects, he is now CEO of Giant Skull.

There's a long tradition of movie makers using artistic licence when depicting past events, and Sony's Santa Monica Studio embraced this idea of favouring entertainment over historical accuracy when it made its plans for *God Of War*. It envisaged bloody combat being fought by an ashen warrior in an ancient Greece inspired by the silver screen. It imagined a world ruled by merciless gods and plagued by mythical monsters, and in true Hollywood style it wanted its creation to be triumphantly over the top, as the game's lead environment artist Stig Asmussen points out. "The style was Greek mythology meets *Heavy Metal* magazine. We wanted to have that *flair* in the worlds; we wanted the game to feel larger than life," Stig enthuses. "Creative director David Jaffe used to talk about the perception of Greek mythology, and how it wasn't necessarily accurate. It was more from what people had seen, and so the things we built in *God Of War* were more like *Clash Of The Titans* than the ruins in Athens."

God Of War's ancient Greek setting was novel in that relatively few games had explored the period, and it reflected its target market's fascination with the era. This last point made *God Of War*'s worldbuilding easier, but as its lead coder Tim Moss explains completing the project required a Herculean effort. "Greek mythology is super popular in America, so everyone knew who the main characters were, meaning that was one thing less to explain," Tim notes. "We started *God Of War* in 2001, but we didn't start with the idea that it would ultimately take four years. We crunched like motherfuckers. We were young and enthusiastic, and we didn't know any better, so we worked hard and kept moving the deadline. That was the way it got done."

The approach to creating *God Of War* was highly innovative. Aside from debugging, the tools coded for the project allowed the game's artists and designers to create levels and gameplay without input from its programmers. The flexibility of their engine also meant there was very little 'special case' gameplay coding required, as Tim explains. "One of the tricks of *God Of War* was as much as it was a great piece of games design it was also a really good bit of tech," Tim reviews. "We made a very good engine then we handed control of it over to the designers. We gave them the tools and they had to make something cool with them. We used an arts package called Maya as our game editor. All the tools were built into that so the artists and design team could largely make the game on their own. The programmers would just help when something went wrong."

> "THE STYLE WAS GREEK MYTHOLOGY MEETS HEAVY METAL MAGAZINE. WE WANTED TO HAVE THAT FLAIR IN THE WORLDS; WE WANTED THE GAME TO FEEL LARGER THAN LIFE"
>
> STIG ASMUSSEN

The tools created for *God Of War* allowed its designers to realise the bloody combat and gore that they envisioned for the game. Environment lead Stig Asmussen remembers how the look of its warrior protagonist Kratos and the locations he fought in emphasised the graphic nature of his brutal violence. "We had a lot of white marble and we were able to do reflections, so the bloody bodies fell onto things that were stark and that worked as a contrast," Stig recalls. "Kratos himself was white too, so we were able to define the massacre he was creating because he ▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: WAR JOURNAL (2005–2007)

THE ORIGINAL, A SEQUEL AND A MOBILE OUTING

GOD OF WAR

Set in an ancient Greece where gods and mythical creatures are real and present dangers, *God Of War*'s bloody combat makes you feel all-powerful until you face an epic boss fight. Challenging platforming, perplexing puzzles and engaging cutscenes nicely punctuate the intense and gory battles.

GOD OF WAR II

As good as *God Of War*'s graphics look, they pale in comparison to *God Of War II*'s sumptuous environments, beautifully rendered characters and impressive effects. The sequel also outdoes the original in terms of its gameplay, boasting many more on-screen enemies and far more boss encounters.

GOD OF WAR: BETRAYAL

It's uncanny how well *God Of War: Betrayal* adapts the combat, platforming and puzzles of the PS2 games to work in a 2D side-scrolling brawler. The Java phone title's visuals are top-notch, it's a riot of blood and gore, and it introduces undead opponents and even emulates quick-time events.

» [PlayStation 2] Epic boss fights are a big part of *God Of War*, and you never know when a boss might appear.

» [PlayStation 2] Precision is essential to making it past some of *God Of War*'s platforming challenges.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
WAR JOURNAL 2008–2010

A PSP TITLE, A BUNDLE AND A THIRD CORE TITLE

GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

A prequel to the PS2 *God Of War* titles and a PSP original, *Chains Of Olympus* is a showcase for what Sony's handheld can do. The highly acclaimed release is every bit as cinematic and intense as the PS2 games, its combat is as fluid, fast and furious, and its bosses are as vast and challenging.

GOD OF WAR COLLECTION

Released just a few months before the launch of *God Of War III*, *God Of War Collection* consists of remastered HD ports of the PS2 games for the PS3. The collection would allow PS3 owners who hadn't played the first two *God Of War* games to catch up before playing the third.

GOD OF WAR III

The shift to PS3 with *God Of War III* enabled its creators to realise the full potential of the series. Its in-game graphics are stunning and its cutscenes are worthy of a film. Instead of small groups of foes Kratos faces entire armies, and the game's bosses are the Greek gods themselves.

» [PlayStation 2] There are some seriously heavy duty weapons in *God Of War*, such as the crossbow-like Ballista.

always stood out in it. Kratos being covered in white ash was decided early on. Dave Jaffe [*God Of War*'s director and lead designer] had seen an illustration where lead concept artist Charlie Wen hadn't done the skin treatment yet. So Kratos was still white on the page, and Dave said that was really cool. I don't know if he thought of the ash at that point, but that might have been a catalyst."

> "PEGASUS WAS DIFFICULT BECAUSE IT WAS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT THAN EVERYTHING ELSE. REALLY IT WAS ASKING FOR SOMETHING THAT WAS SLIGHTLY OUTSIDE THE CAPABILITIES OF THE ENGINE"
>
> TIM MOSS

The distinct look of *God Of War*'s player character and the game's cocktail of violent combat, platforming and puzzles proved popular on its release. Thanks to its success a sequel was approved. Its director of technology Tim Moss highlights the challenges of Kratos riding the mythical flying horse Pegasus in the follow-up. "We made *God Of War II* in two years, but really most of the game was finished in the nine months up to its completion," Tim caveats. "We were very time pressured. I mean the crunch was even worse than the first one. So we were working very hard to try to make something good, and Pegasus was one of the new things that we did. Pegasus was difficult because it was completely different than everything else. Really it was asking for something that was slightly outside the capabilities of the engine that we had."

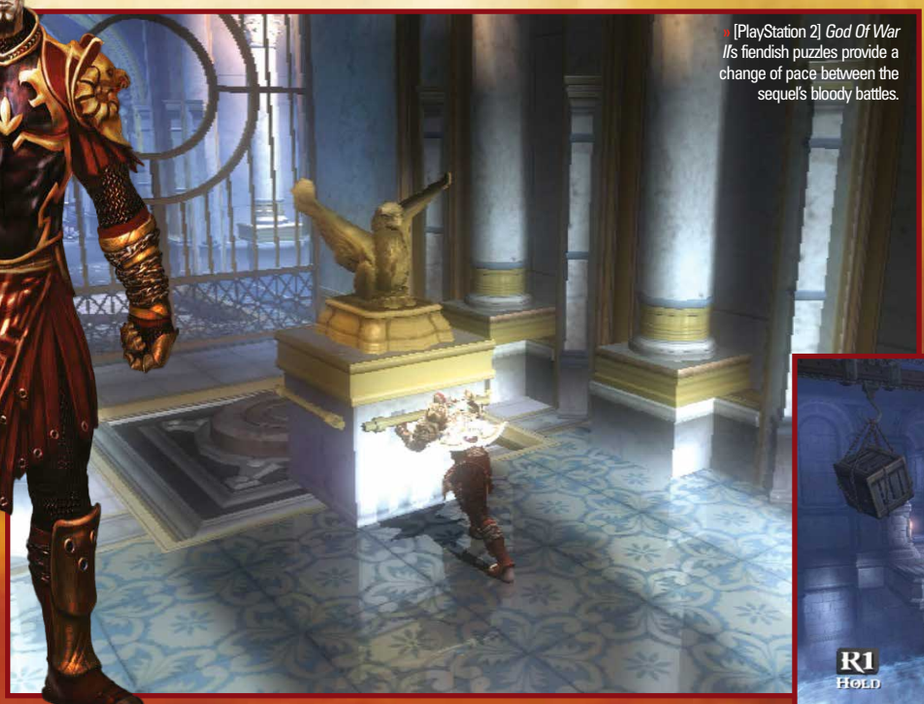
Other aspects of *God Of War II* also tested its engine. The depth and number of boss fights represented a major improvement on the original game. Not only did bosses appear regularly rather than sporadically, but these setpiece encounters involved more complex and multilayered combat, and greater environmental interaction. "The boss scripting was another thing that was really new, that was why we had many more bosses," Tim observes. "I think there were three in the first game, or maybe even just two. The bosses in *God Of War II* got a lot better too, because we put a lot more effort in. Some of them were more like really clever regular enemies, which was not the case in the first game."

As art director on *God Of War II*, Stig Asmussen was involved in making the game more atmospheric through the use of advanced lighting effects. Aside from aesthetic enhancements, his team was also responsible for creating opponents for Kratos in such a way that as many as possible could appear on-screen simultaneously. "We were able to get things like bloom working in *God Of War II*, that changed the look of everything in terms of the lighting," Stig assesses. "It was like if *God Of War* was a ten then we were going to take *God Of War II* to an eleven. So everything was bigger and bolder, and there was more of it, like we designed a lot of the new enemies that we introduced so that you could have more of them on the screen."

Further innovations in *God Of War II* followed as more figures from ancient Greek myths were introduced to the series, and thanks to clever writing these well-known characters were given twists to suit the follow-up's mature themes. New weapons were also created for the sequel, including one that continued its predecessor's celebration of excess. "The Barbarian Hammer was born out of having this large imposing character, and making a hammer that was basically the same size as him!" Stig says with a grin. "Then Kratos using that against the Barbarian King was one of the pinnacle moments of the game. The new characters were born out of Cory Barlog and the writing team's idea of where they wanted to take the story. It was a fun project because it was a major upgrade, and that was something that lived on with *God Of War III*."

Before Santa Monica Studio's third *God Of War* title, the series continued with a PSP exclusive that was set before the original game. *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus* was

[PlayStation 2] Despite its impressively eclectic gameplay, *God Of War II* is best known for its intense combat.



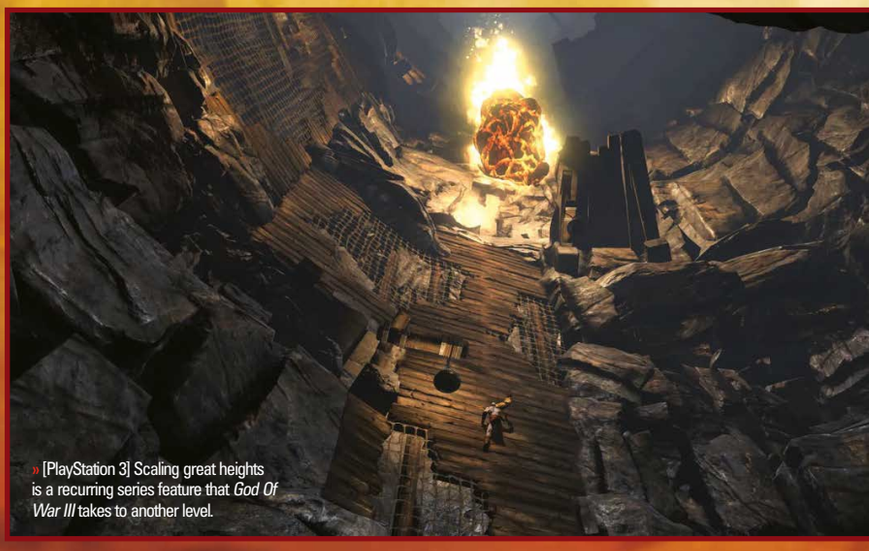
[PlayStation 2] *God Of War II*'s fiendish puzzles provide a change of pace between the sequel's bloody battles.

[PlayStation 2] Riding Pegasus over moonlit clouds and into battle adds variety of challenge to *God Of War II*.

» [PSP] Like all early *God Of War* titles, the main weapons in *Chains Of Olympus* are the Blades Of Chaos.

» [PSP] The Persian king in *Chains Of Olympus* has a powerful magic attack that's yours if you beat him.

» [PSP] *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus* has you using a battering ram to bring down the gates of Atticus.



» [PlayStation 3] Scaling great heights is a recurring series feature that *God Of War III* takes to another level.

developed by Ready At Dawn, although senior Santa Monica Studio creatives such as technical director Tim Moss provided oversight. "Ready At Dawn had made the PSP game *Daxter*, and we said let's go talk to this studio about making a *God Of War* game for the PSP with us," Tim comments. "So we started making *Chains Of Olympus*, and some freelance designers who had been working on *God Of War* and *God Of War II* ended up working with Ready At Dawn to try to make sure there was continuity in some key elements of the combat design."

> "IT WAS REALLY IMPORTANT FOR US TO COMPLETE KRATOS' JOURNEY. THERE WAS A GROUP OF GODS, AND HE WAS GOING TO TAKE ONE DOWN AT A TIME"
>
> STIG ASMUSSEN

With *Chains Of Olympus* being an original title rather than a conversion and given that *God Of War III* was years away from release it might have followed to make the PSP exclusive a sequel instead of a prequel. But as Tim explains, there were good reasons for not doing so. "I think *Chains Of Olympus* was made a prequel because *we* were making the sequels," Tim reasons. "We always wanted Ready At Dawn to do something original. To be honest in the beginning we weren't really sure if it *could* have converted *God Of War*, but we were also interested in expanding the franchise and telling some different stories. We felt that a game made specifically for the PSP would be more successful than trying to do a conversion, and I think that was probably a good call."

The near perfect reviews received by *Chains Of Olympus* reflected the fact that it played so well to the PSP's strengths. At this time, its successor *God Of War III* was being developed for the PS3. Its game director Stig Asmussen describes how its narrative shaped the way it played. "It was really important for us to complete Kratos' journey," Stig considers. "He was on a rampage and everyone was against him. There was a group of gods, and he was going to take one down at a time. Each one was a boss, and Kratos was granted powers from each one of them so that by the time he stood up to Zeus and Gaia he would be their worst nightmare. Because by then he would be more powerful than them."

Of course, Kratos wouldn't be starting out as all-powerful in *God Of War III*, but he was capable of defeating hoards of opponents from the beginning of the game. This was fortunate because with the follow-up being developed for the PS3 it was possible to have a screen full of foes. "The number of enemies we could have on-screen at the same time was about 50, and we did have 50 skeletons at once in the game without it going below 60 frames per second!" Stig exclaims. "One of the best ways to exemplify the power curve in *God Of War III* was having Kratos be able to mow through tons of different enemies, but then after that we would have one big bad enemy that was going to give him a meaty fight."

The biggest enemies in *God Of War III* were initially allies. The vast size of the Titans meant that Kratos could move around on them as he did in the game's more traditional stages. Making this possible didn't come without challenges, as the follow-up's director of technology Tim Moss details. "Riding around on those enormous creatures while they moved about, and effectively having them as a level, was a key feature," Tim states. "We probably spent 50% of all of the programming resources making that work, even though it was probably only 35 or 40 minutes of a 14-hour game. It was basically because the designers really wanted it. They were convinced it was going to be worth the technical undertaking, and they were right!"

Of far less technical consideration but of great importance to *God Of War III*'s gameplay was the introduction of a mechanic where

» [PlayStation 3] The button-mashing feats of strength you perform in *God Of War III* continue a series tradition.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: WAR JOURNAL 2010–2012

ANOTHER HANDHELD OFFERING AND TWO COLLECTIONS

GOD OF WAR: GHOST OF SPARTA

The second PSP *God Of War* title sits between *God Of War* and *God Of War II* in terms of narrative and is nothing short of a technical tour de force. As well as higher-quality visuals it has more on-screen foes and bosses, and it introduces cool new weapons and magical abilities to the series.

GOD OF WAR: COLLECTION VOLUME II

Known as *God Of War Origins Collection* in some regions, *Collection Volume II* contains remastered HD ports of the PSP *God Of War* titles for the PS3. Developed by Ready At Dawn, the studio that created the PSP originals, it's a faithful adaptation with added extras such as Stereoscopic 3D.

GOD OF WAR SAGA

The ultimate collection of pre-reboot *God Of War* games, *God Of War Saga* has the remastered HD versions of the PS2 titles on one disk and *God Of War III* on another. It comes with a voucher to download the remastered HD versions of the PSP games, although the steelbook release has them on disc.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
WAR JOURNAL 2013–2018
THE FOURTH CORE GAME, A REMASTER AND A PREQUEL

GOD OF WAR: ASCENSION
Santa Monica Studio's fourth *God Of War* title is a departure for a couple of reasons. It's a prequel to every game that came before it, and it's the first and only *God Of War* game to provide a multiplayer offering. Its solo campaign pits Kratos against goddesses of vengeance known as Furies.

GOD OF WAR III REMASTERED
Released five years after *God Of War III* to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the original *God Of War*, this remastered 1080p HD PS4 title took the third game to new heights of visual fidelity. The PS4 remaster contains all of the DLC created for the PS3 version, and it sold in its millions.

GOD OF WAR: A CALL FROM THE WILDS
A 2D *God Of War* in the form of *Betrayal* might have been an unlikely project, but it was a far more probable release than this short-lived *God Of War* prequel to the 2018 reboot. A text adventure that ran on Facebook messenger, *A Call From The Wilds* rewarded progress with beautifully painted concept art.

players could rapidly swap weapons during battles. Tim regards this feature as defining the combat in the follow-up, and by extension he sees it as a defining aspect of the entire game. "To some degree changing weapons *was* the game; you had to pick the right weapon for the appropriate combat," Tim appraises. "If you were playing with the wrong weapon you were going to lose. The different weapons were good in different scenarios. Did you use the bow to stagger an enemy and make them easier to hit with a bladed weapon? That was where the fun was hidden. It was making people work things like that out when they walked into a room. That was *God Of War III* in a nutshell."

> "THE IDEA WAS TO MAKE A CO-OP GAME WITH TWO CHARACTERS. I THINK IT WAS ABOUT THE TIME WHEN GEARS OF WAR CAME OUT"
>
> TIM MOSS

Some months after *God Of War III* was launched to universal acclaim, a second PSP exclusive set between the PS2 releases came out. As with *Chains Of Olympus*, *God Of War: Ghost Of Sparta* was produced by Ready At Dawn with input from Santa Monica Studio, including technology director Tim Moss. "I'm not sure what the thinking was for *Ghost Of Sparta*'s chronology, but it was probably that by that point we had shipped the first two games, so it was easier since we had established the lore to add more stuff in-between them," Tim contemplates. "Rightly or wrongly there were the main games and the PSP games. The main storyline was being done on the PlayStation and the secondary narrative was being done on the PSP. Truthfully that's what you get when you're the developer of a series. You get to make those choices."

Just as the hierarchy of set-top and handheld *God Of War* releases was clear, the respect between the two studios creating them was unequivocal. As Tim makes mention of, this chimes with players' appreciation for *Ghost Of Sparta*'s originality and it being as highly acclaimed as its PSP predecessor *Chains Of Olympus*. "I think we wanted to keep making the main stories at the Santa Monica Studio, but at the same time we wanted to make PSP games," Tim says of *Ghost Of Sparta*. "They had a really good team at Ready At Dawn, and they really pushed the PSP probably harder than anyone else. The audience wanted this follow-up, because they were happier with an original title than with a conversion."

» [PSP] This boss-fight with a sea serpent is typical of the cinematic setpieces in *Ghost Of Sparta*.

» [PSP] Like earlier *God Of War* games, *Ghost Of Sparta* has plenty of shimmying along ledges in order to get to new areas.

Rather than a follow-up, the subsequent PS3 release *God Of War: Ascension* was a prequel to the original PS2 title. As with its predecessors, *Ascension* had platforming and puzzles to complement its combat, but unlike them it also had online multiplayer. This was initially intended to be local co-op, as its director of technology Tim Moss explains. "The idea was to make a co-op game with two characters," Tim reflects. "I think it was about the time when *Gears Of War* came out, which you could play almost like you were walking down two sides of a corridor. A lot of people were playing it, and we thought we could do something similar. So we started off with this idea, but then it ended up with us making a peer-to-peer fighting game, and that took up a lot of engineering time."

In addition to being time consuming, delivering the code for *Ascension*'s online multiplayer offering was also challenging. It turns out there's a reason why third-person shooters often have multiplayer and third-person hack and slash titles don't, as Tim and his team of coders found out. "It didn't work as well as we wanted," Tim acknowledges. "Melee combat depends on the sword feeling impactful when it hits someone, and it's really difficult ▶

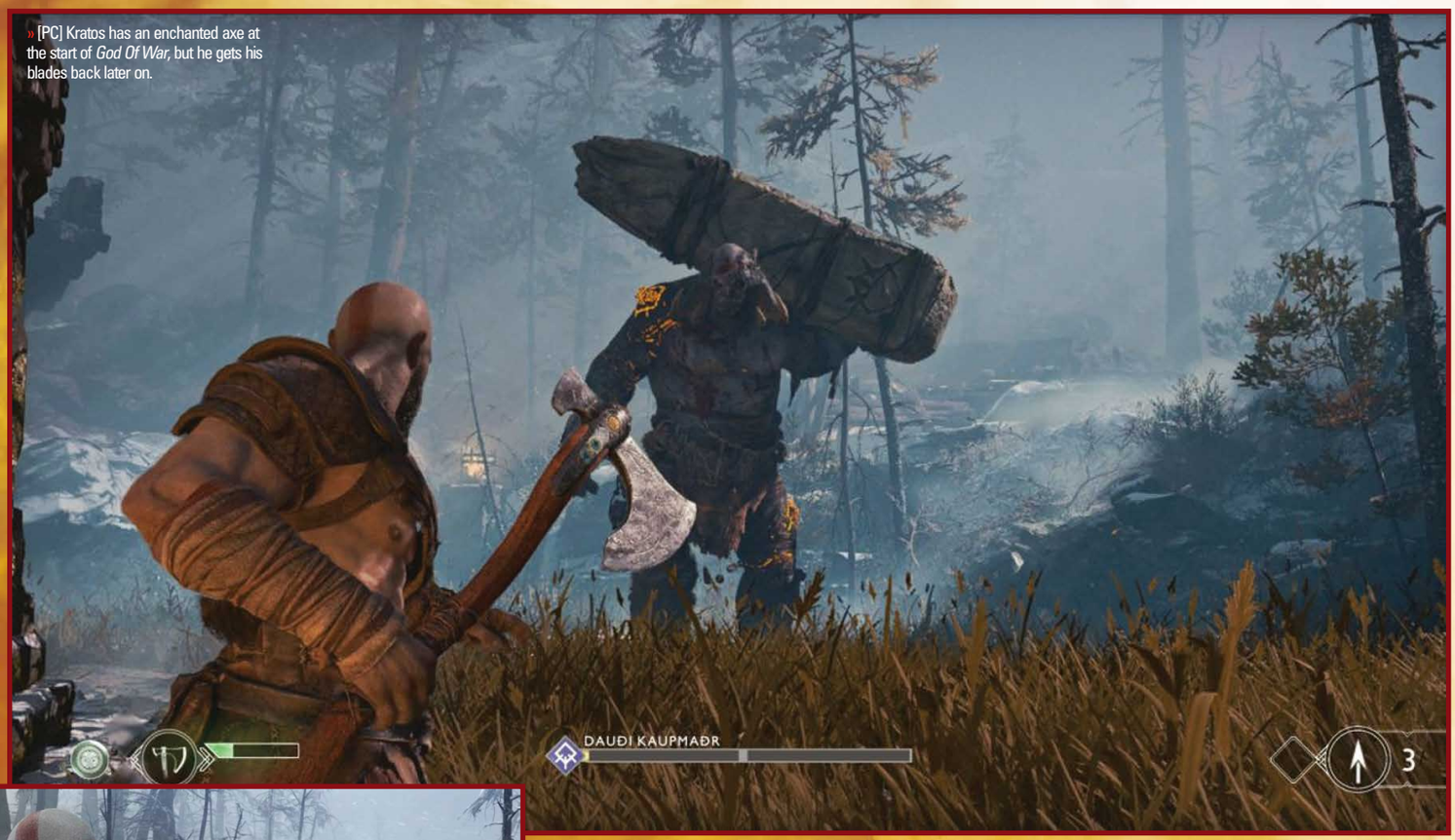
» [PlayStation 3] The big bads in *God Of War: Ascension* are three goddesses of vengeance known as Furies.

» [PlayStation 3] *God Of War: Ascension*'s dimly lit Prison Of The Damned is home to horribly mutated prisoners.

» [PlayStation 3] Large insect-like creatures plague Kratos in *God Of War: Ascension*, but they're easily crushed.

» [PC] Useful new abilities can be learned in the new *God Of War* by examining environmental features.

» [PC] An important element of *God Of War* is that protagonist Kratos now has a son to take care of.



» [PC] Kratos has an enchanted axe at the start of *God Of War*, but he gets his blades back later on.

» [PlayStation 4] Kratos has to navigate his way around a hub world called the Lake Of Nine in *God Of War Ragnarök*.

to make that feel convincing in a multiplayer environment. So we spent the vast majority of our engineering time trying to make the multiplayer work, and ultimately people played the single-player game that really hadn't taken as many forward leaps as the previous games."

By comparison, the title that followed *Ascension* took some major leaps forward. The *God Of War* from 2018 saw an older Kratos raising his son as much as raising hell, although naturally the pair were forever being drawn into conflict. As development support on the game, Tim is well placed to explain this evolution. "Cory Barlog the director for *God Of War II* came back to the studio," Tim recollects. "He had been working with George Miller on the latest *Mad Max* movie, and he came back with a whole bunch of inspirations. He wanted to do something completely different with Kratos. We were all growing up, and making something with mature themes seemed interesting. So Cory in particular had this idea about this father/son relationship."

> "WE WERE ALL GROWING UP, AND MAKING SOMETHING WITH MATURE THEMES SEEMED INTERESTING. SO CORY IN PARTICULAR HAD THIS IDEA ABOUT THIS FATHER/SON RELATIONSHIP"
>
> TIM MOSS

Platforming challenges and challenging puzzles remained part of the 2018 game, but instead of an ancient Greek setting and chained blades Kratos wandered the Norse lands of old and favoured a throwing axe. Tim notes how the reboot's weapon became an option because of the game's lack of camera cuts. "The main myths we looked at were the obvious ones: Egyptian and Norse," Tim remembers. "Norse was picked because actually it was familiar but *not* familiar. I think the plan was to do Egyptian at some point. The axe would never have worked in the previous *God Of War* games with their fixed camera positions, because half of it was about targeting the environment. So with new decisions about how the control mechanics worked came new decisions about things like the weapons."

It speaks volumes that *God Of War* ultimately became one of the best-selling PS4 titles. Naturally a follow-up was developed that continued Kratos and his son's journey through Norse mythology while building on its predecessor's gameplay. In *God Of War Ragnarök*, the ashen warrior gained access to a magic spear, and there were new ways for him to defend himself and attack opponents using his shield.

Aside from boasting new enemies and mini-bosses based on mythical Norse figures, allies of Kratos would come to his aid in *Ragnarök*. Other innovations included Kratos's son Atreus becoming the player character in some parts of their mission. Then of course that mission to save the Norse realms from the existential threat of *Ragnarök* added further differentiation from the 2018 game.

When reviewing the original *God Of War*, Santa Monica Studio's former lead coder and technical director Tim Moss only has praise, and he singles out another *God Of War* title. "I think *God Of War* is a great piece of engineering and I'm very proud of it, but I'm most proud of the third one," Tim qualifies. "We made a really great game, and I'm proud I got to make something that will probably outlive me."

Environment lead, and art and game director on the series Stig Asmussen has similar thoughts. "*God Of War* is a blast, and it's amazing how well *God Of War III* holds up," Stig offers. "So I think the *God Of War* games are going to stand the test of time and influence things going forward for a very long time."

And with the recent release of *Sons Of Sparta* and news that the first three games are being remade, *God Of War*'s legacy looks set to continue for a long time to come. ✱

» [PlayStation 4] The Norse end days depicted in *God Of War Ragnarök* involve combat with some wild and wonderful creatures.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: WAR JOURNAL 2018–2023

A REBOOT, THE LATEST CORE TITLE AND ITS DLC

GOD OF WAR

While not a complete reinvention of the franchise, the 2018 reboot sees an older, wiser Kratos raising his son. He's in the Norse lands of old rather than ancient Greece, and instead of chained blades he has an axe that returns when thrown. However his battles are epic and bloody as always.

GOD OF WAR RAGNARÖK

The sequel to the 2018 title continues its story with the coming of the existential event of Norse legend Ragnarök. While retaining the combat, puzzles and role-playing elements of its predecessor, *Ragnarök* ups the ante with new weapons and making Kratos' son a playable character at certain points.

GOD OF WAR RAGNARÖK: VALHALLA

This *Ragnarök* DLC Roguelite lands Kratos in the Norse afterlife of Valhalla where he seeks to make peace with his past transgressions in ancient Greece. His path to redemption takes the form of a series of combat-focussed trials against mythical opponents from Norse and ancient Greek legends.

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THE MAKING OF CRYSTAL KINGDOM DIZZY

THE WALLET-FRIENDLY DIZZY SERIES WAS A HUGE SUCCESS FOR CODEMASTERS, BUT WHAT HAPPENED WHEN IT DECIDED TO MAKE A FULL-PRICE DIZZY GAME? DID CODEMASTERS CRACK THE MARKET OR DID IT END UP WITH EGG ON ITS FACE?

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

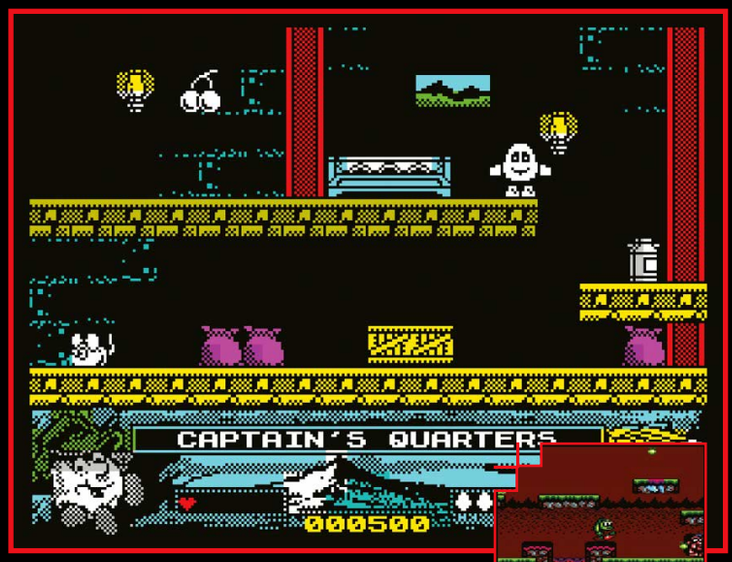
IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
- **DEVELOPER:** VISUAL IMPACT, REFLECTIVE DESIGNS
- **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

***Dizzy* doesn't really require an introduction.** If you're at all familiar with home-computer games from the late-Eighties and early Nineties, then the character and the adventure titles in which the anthropomorphic egg starred are sure to be recognisable. Heck, you might have even read about him in **Retro Gamer** before. This is the series in which the lead character jumped and rolled around a fantasy world, collecting items and solving puzzles. And yet when *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* hit the shelves in December 1992, it looked and felt a tad different.

It wasn't just that the game had a few tweaks here and there, nor that it had a fresh appearance, a couple of notable cameos and even a change to how Dizzy moved. No, there was also a difference to how much you needed to shell out for this seventh *Dizzy* adventure because *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* was the first time that Codemasters had decided to give the series a full-price release and, it's fair to say, the changes split opinion.

Work began on the game in April 1992, four months after the sixth graphic adventure, *Dizzy: Prince Of The Yolkfolk*, was given a standalone budget release, having previously been bundled as part of the *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures* compilation. The series' creators, Philip and Andrew Oliver, had long handed over the development reins for the franchise, with Big Red Software picking up the baton from *Magicland Dizzy* (the fourth adventure) onwards. But for a new *Dizzy*, another fresh pair of hands was needed.



» [ZX Spectrum] The Spectrum version of the game, despite being full price, still reached the top of the charts, beating *Street Fighter II*.

» [ZX Spectrum] Some puzzles required you to collect three items which would all be used at once.

"It's complicated but while I was running my own business I was also running the development at Codemasters too," says Big Red's founder Paul Ranson. Big Red couldn't continue with *Dizzy* because it was working on another game ("I can't remember what") yet the Olivers were keen to see another entry in the series. "Andrew and I were very aware that there was still a strong appetite for *Dizzy* games on home computers in the UK and across Europe but, at the same

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

YOGI'S GREAT ESCAPE
PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1990

POTSWORTH & CO
PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1992

TURBO THE TORTOISE (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1992

» Dave Thompson was a key force in creating *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy*. He's now development director at CCP London.

"ON THE CPC, I ALWAYS TRIED TO USE MODE 0 WHERE POSSIBLE"
DAVE THOMPSON

» [ZX Spectrum] "Surf's up," says Fat Freddy. "Up what?" replies Dizzy, raising a smile in this fun game.

time, we were heavily focussed on console development, primarily for the NES and the American market, with the hope those games might later make it back to Europe via platforms like the Master System and eventually the Mega Drive," Philip says.

Codemasters didn't have to spend a long time looking for a suitable studio. "Craig Kelsall and Dave Thompson of Visual Impact had approached Codemasters at exactly the right time and they were offered the chance to lead the development of a new *Dizzy* game," Philip explains.

Visual Impact hadn't reckoned on taking over the *Dizzy* series but the small team was certainly experienced. Although they'd only worked on two previous titles under the Visual Impact name (*Potsworth & Co* and *Turbo The Tortoise* for Hi-Tec Software), their individual names were attached to other games, mostly published by Hi-Tec.

In fact, it had just completed *Turbo The Tortoise* only for Hi-Tec to go bust shortly after its release. Codemasters had swooped in and published the game which had placed Visual Impact firmly on its radar. "From what I recall, we made a general approach rather than a big, 'Here's our *Dizzy*

CONVERSION CAPERS

THERE WERE SOME CRACKING VERSIONS OF THE GAME

AMSTRAD CPC

■ Visual Impact's decision to use a different graphics mode to the previous *Dizzy* adventure games was more than justified. The lower resolution was barely noticeable, with the player's eye entirely caught by the great use of colour. It moved along at a nice pace, too.

C64

■ Arguably the best looking 8-bit version, the C64's *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* had some beautifully drawn backdrops and it even had a blue sky (rather than black). Some lovely animation and great audio but, in terms of gameplay, it's the same as the other 8-bits.

AMIGA

■ Other than the more pleasant tune, there wasn't much to distinguish between the Amiga and Atari ST versions other than more graphical detail like a shaded sky. The game was also released on the Amiga CD32 console as part of the *Big 6* compilation of *Dizzy* games.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ The Spectrum version wasn't as colourful as on the CPC but it's otherwise identical in terms of how it plays. The Speccy had a trio of unofficial remakes in 2009, 2017 and 2025, though, enhancing the look considerably while adding elements detailed in Philip Oliver's original notes.

ATARI ST

■ With its cartoon-like graphics, slick presentation and different soundtrack, the Atari ST version was certainly polished. It also had more locations than on the 8-bits as well as a different structure, but this allowed the gameplay to be fleshed out a little more.

» [C64] With the right equipment, Dizzy could plunge into the water and swim.

» [C64] According to Paul Ranson there was a "mad scramble" to get *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* completed before its intended Christmas 1992 release.

» [C64] As well as completing puzzles, there were cherries to collect to boost your score. Each one was worth 250 points.

▶ pitch,'" says Dave. "Then, pretty much out of the blue, Codemasters asked if we'd be interested in doing a full-price *Dizzy*. The timing was perfect."

Visual Impact was also made up of Dennis Mullinier and Mark Wallace. Dave met the pair when he was 16 years old, straight out of school and working at R & R Distribution selling software. "Dennis was managing the Micro Centre in Hanley and Mark was his best mate, and we were always talking about making games rather than just playing them." Dave handled the programming, Dennis worked on design and art and Mark ran the business. "Jarrod Bentley joined later and created the graphics, and Craig Kelsall worked alongside us too on the C64 side," Dave continues.

To aid development, Philip had already put pen to paper and produced an intricate design for a new *Dizzy* that included a plot outline, map locations, character dialogue, development notes, objects and an idea of how they'd be used with the puzzles. Yet most of the ideas failed to make it into the game.

The team had their own thoughts on how to evolve the *Dizzy* series. "I don't remember receiving a big formal design document or anything like that. It was more a case of, 'Here's what we're thinking' from a games perspective," Dave says. So while a document did exist – simply headed *Dizzy 7* – the game very much became Visual Impact's own. And one of the first decisions was to create all of the graphics for the different versions from scratch. "The team wanted to start fresh rather than reuse existing editors, maps or assets," Philip tells us.

For Visual Impact, this made sense. "We had our own ways of doing things (what you'd call pipelines nowadays)," Dave adds. "For instance, how we created the screens and sprites was fairly bespoke to us, so using our own toolset made sense. We also required new assets because of the gameplay experience we wanted to create. They didn't already exist."

The impact of this decision was perhaps most noticeable on the Amstrad CPC version of the game. "Previously, Andrew and I had deliberately stuck with the CPC's Mode 1, which had matching pixel sizes to the Spectrum, allowing us to share assets and keep production manageable," Philip says. "For *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy*, the decision was taken to prioritise colour and visual richness on the CPC, then adapt that look across to the C64."

> "I WAS A HUGE NINTENDO/MARIO FAN, AND THAT INFLUENCED HOW I THOUGHT MOVEMENT AND CONTROL SHOULD WORK"
> DAVE THOMPSON

CYNIC CORNER

OTHER GAMES THAT LEAPT TO FULL PRICE

WORLD CUP CARNIVAL

■ Reviewers generally liked *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* but they questioned how Codemasters justified releasing it as a full-priced title. The same question was asked of US Gold's *World Cup Carnival* in 1986. It took a two-year-old game, Arctic's poor *World Cup Football*, added a practice mode and threw in a wall-chart, some stickers and a sew-on badge, pricing it all at £9.95 – £3 more than the original.

DOUBLE DRAGON II: THE REVENGE

■ This game was originally being developed as an upgrade kit for *Double Dragon* but as time went on, it was decided to release it as a standalone sequel. There were a fair few changes (fresh backgrounds, a fresh control scheme and new bosses) but it reused some assets from the first game. Many reviewers have argued that it was just more of the same and was really still a mission pack.

BATMAN

■ Holy rip off! *Batman* was one of a number of games which, upon being released for Amstrad's ill-fated GX4000 console, ended up being near-identical (if not actually identical) to the version sold on tape and disk for the Amstrad CPC. It wouldn't have been so bad if it didn't cost a whopping £10 to £15 more for the privilege of playing what was already an ageing game from a cartridge.

» [C64] The game, produced under the working title of *Dizzy And The Lost Treasure Of The Yolkfolk*, allowed players to hold up to three items in their inventory.

» [Amstrad CPC] CJ The Elephant made a surprise appearance in the game.

» [Amstrad CPC] Grand Dizzy is in a terrible mood and it's up to Dizzy to find the stolen treasures to cheer him up.

» [Amstrad CPC] The game featured the Yolkfolk as with most of the previous titles. They included Dizzy's girlfriend, Daisy.

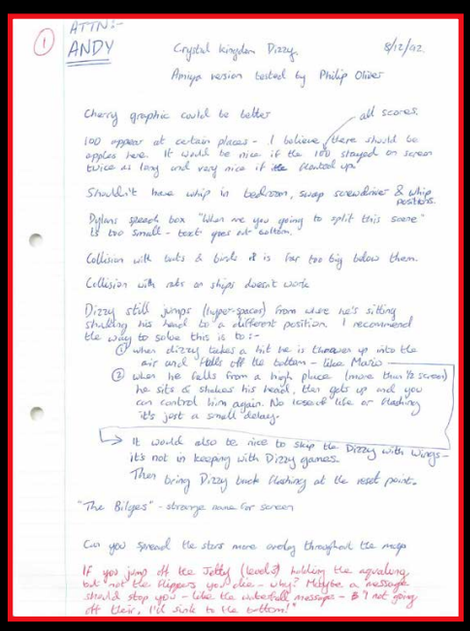
To achieve this, the Visual Impact team used the CPC's Mode 0 which upped the number of on-screen colours from four to 16. "It allowed more colour but produced graphics that were incompatible with the Spectrum," Philip says. "As a result, all graphics effectively had to be created twice." Even so, Visual Impact felt it was the correct approach. "On the CPC, I always tried to use Mode 0 where possible," Dave says. "The 16 colours just let you make the game look richer and more 'premium', and, for a full-price release, that mattered. The downside was you were always battling memory and performance."

Codemasters agreed that this approach would help justify the extra pounds the publisher was going to charge for the game so Jarrod got working on the graphics for all three 8-bit versions, using a custom version of Melbourne Draw. He based his visuals on some 16-bit *Dizzy* artwork that he'd been given as a reference. This influenced the look of the game's status panel and the main characters. The backgrounds were produced on the Commodore 64 first before being ported to the CPC and Spectrum. This proved easier on the CPC because it shared a larger pixel size with the C64.

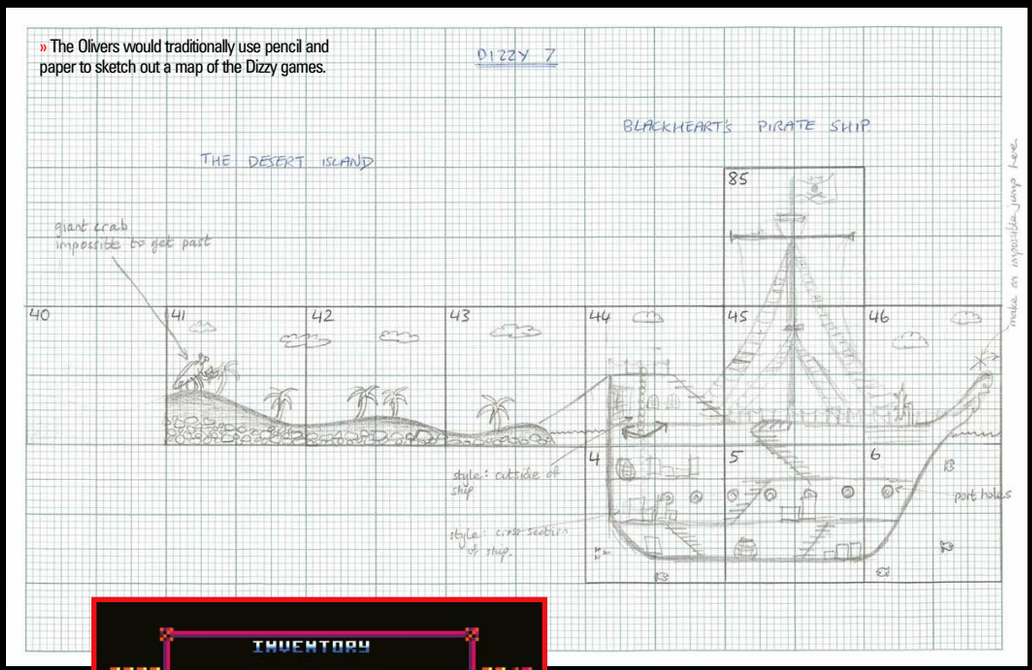
The alterations were more than skin deep, though. There was also a major change to the way Dizzy jumped. In the past, the character could roll forward but this behaviour was dropped. "I definitely wanted *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* to feel great as a platform game," Dave explains of the decision. "I was a huge Nintendo/*Mario* fan, and that influenced how I thought movement and control should work. We tweaked Dizzy's jump so that the landing didn't force a rolling momentum, making it more controllable. Some people loved it, some hated it, which is fair enough."

Crystal Kingdom Dizzy was also split into four sections and this altered the way players could approach the game. With previous *Dizzy* titles, For Free Mags Check Soft.ac players needed to work their way from beginning to end in one sitting but now there was a chance to do it level by level. Passcodes were issued after the completion of a section, allowing players to jump back into the game at that point, effectively creating a save point. "This was added purely for practical reasons: memory limits and the desire to make it feel bigger than previous titles," Dave says. "Splitting the game into chunks helped pacing and made it feel like you were getting more ' adventure' for the money."

At the time of development, the team were all in their 20s. "We worked together as a small team in cramped spaces, creating over many long nights, and crowding around our computers to play a new feature the moment it was implemented," Dave recalls. The game was written and compiled on an Atari ST with hardware linking to the target machine. "It stopped you losing work if it crashed," Dave says. "I also ▶

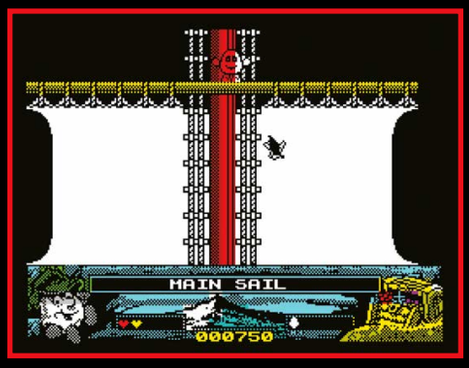

ATTN:-
ANDY
Crystal kingdom Dizzy
8/12/92
Amiga version tested by Philip Oliver
Cherry graphic could be better
all scores
100 appear at certain places - I believe there should be apples here. It would be nice if the 100 stayed on screen twice as long and very nice if the created up
Shouldn't have whip in bedroom, scrap screwdriver & white posters
Dylan's speech box "Where are you going to split this scene" is too small - text goes off bottom.
Collision with bats & birds it is far too big below them.
Collision with rats on ships doesn't work
Dizzy still jumps (hyper-spaces) from where he's sitting shifting his head to a different position. I recommend the way to solve this is to:-
① when dizzy takes a hit he is thrown up into the air and falls off the bottom - like Mario
② when he falls from a high place (more than 1½ screen) he sits & shakes his head, then gets up and you can control him again. No insect like or flashing - it's just a small delay.
↳ It would also be nice to stop the Dizzy with wings - it's not in keeping with Dizzy games.
Then bring Dizzy back flashing at the next point.
"The Bilges" - strange name for screen
Can you spread the stars more evenly throughout the map
If you jump off the Jetty (level) hitting the agitating bat, not the diggers you'd die - why? Maybe a message should stop you - like the waterfall message - if not going off that, it'll sink to the bottom!

» Philip Oliver tested the various versions of the game and noted a bunch of suggestions for each.

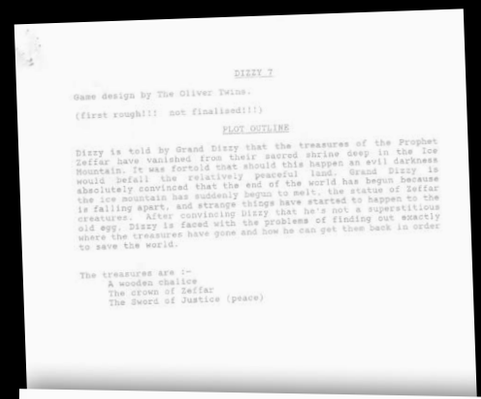


» The Olivers would traditionally use pencil and paper to sketch out a map of the Dizzy games.

» [Amstrad CPC] The developers deliberately introduced innuendo into *Dizzy*: a whip next to Daisy's bed. Ah, that's what it's for!



» [ZX Spectrum] As always there was a lot of trudging about but there was lots of satisfaction to be had after solving a puzzle.


DIZZY 7

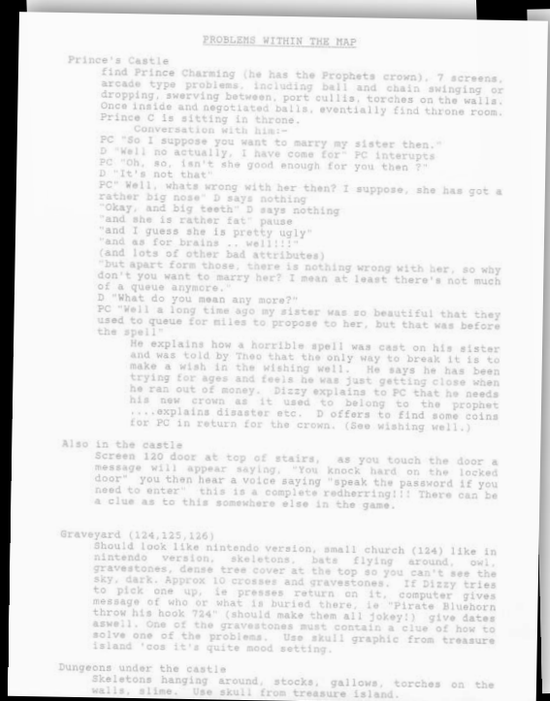
Game design by The Oliver Twins.

(first rough!!! not finalised!!!)

PLOT OUTLINE

Dizzy is told by Grand Dizzy that the treasures of the Prophet Zeffar have vanished from their sacred shrine deep in the Ice Mountain. It was fortold that should this happen an evil darkness would befall the relatively peaceful land. Grand Dizzy is absolutely convinced that the end of the world has begun because the ice mountain has suddenly begun to melt, the statue of Zeffar is falling apart, and strange things have started to happen to the creatures. After convincing Dizzy that he's not a superstitious old egg, Dizzy is faced with the problems of finding out exactly where the treasures have gone and how he can get them back in order to save the world.

The treasures are :-
A wooden chalice
The crown of Zeffar
The Sword of Justice (peace)

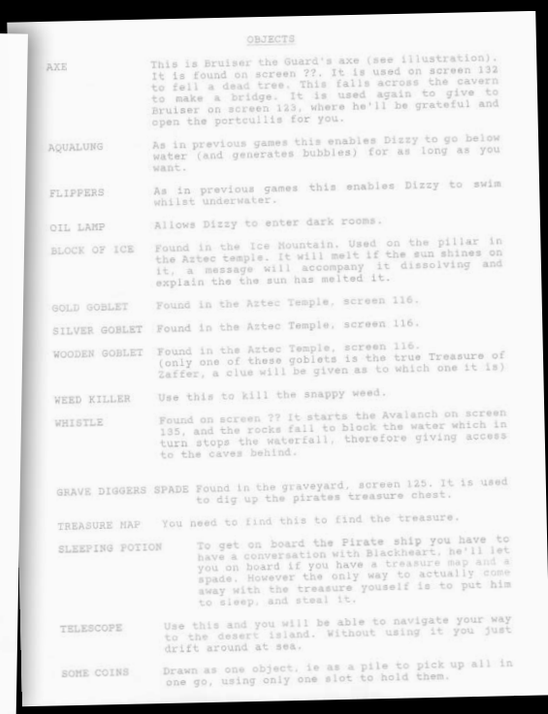

PROBLEMS WITHIN THE MAP

Prince's Castle
find Prince Charming (he has the Prophets crown), 7 screens, arcade type problems, including ball and chain swinging or dropping, swerving between, port cullis, torches on the walls. Once inside and negotiated balls, eventially find throne room. Prince C is sitting in throne.
Conversation with him:-
PC "So I suppose you want to marry my sister then."
D "Well no actually, I have come for" PC interupts
PC "Oh, so, isn't she good enough for you then ?"
D "It's not that"
PC" Well, whats wrong with her then? I suppose, she has got a rather big nose" D says nothing
"Okay, and big teeth" D says nothing
"and she is rather fat" pause
"and I guess she is pretty ugly"
"and as for brains .. well!!!!"
(and lots of other bad attributes)
"but apart form those, there is nothing wrong with her, so why don't you want to marry her? I mean at least there's not much of a queue anymore."
D "What do you mean any more?"
PC "Well a long time ago my sister was so beautiful that they used to queue for miles to propose to her, but that was before the spell"
He explains how a horrible spell was cast on his sister and was told by Theo that the only way to break it is to make a wish in the wishing well. He says he has been trying for ages and feels he was just getting close when he ran out of money. Dizzy explains to PC that he needs his new crown as it used to belong to the prophet ....explains disaster etc. D offers to find some coins for PC in return for the crown. (See wishing well.)

Also in the castle
Screen 120 door at top of stairs, as you touch the door a message will appear saying, "You knock hard on the locked door" you then hear a voice saying "speak the password if you need to enter" this is a complete redherring!!! There can be a clue as to this somewhere else in the game.

Graveyard (124,125,126)
Should look like nintendo version, small church (124) like in nintendo version, skeletons, bats flying around, owl, gravestones, dense tree cover at the top so you can't see the sky, dark. Approx 10 crosses and gravestones. If Dizzy tries to pick one up, ie presses return on it, computer gives message of who or what is buried there, ie "Pirate Bluehorn throw his hook 724" (should make them all jokey!) give dates aswell. One of the gravestones must contain a clue of how to solve one of the problems. Use skull graphic from treasure island 'cos it's quite mood setting.

Dungeons under the castle
Skeletons hanging around, stocks, gallows, torches on the walls, slime. Use skull from treasure island.


OBJECTS

AXE — This is Bruiser the Guard's axe (see illustration). It is found on screen ??. It is used on screen 132 to fell a dead tree. This falls across the cavern to make a bridge. It is used again to give to Bruiser on screen 123, where he'll be grateful and open the portcullis for you.

AQUALUNG — As in previous games this enables Dizzy to go below water (and generates bubbles) for as long as you want.

FLIPPERS — As in previous games this enables Dizzy to swim whilst underwater.

OIL LAMP — Allows Dizzy to enter dark rooms.

BLOCK OF ICE — Found in the Ice Mountain. Used on the pillar in the Aztec temple. It will melt if the sun shines on it, a message will accompany it dissolving and explain the the sun has melted it.

GOLD GOBLET — Found in the Aztec Temple, screen 116.

SILVER GOBLET — Found in the Aztec Temple, screen 116.

WOODEN GOBLET — Found in the Aztec Temple, screen 116. (only one of these goblets is the true Treasure of Zaffer, a clue will be given as to which one it is)

WEED KILLER — Use this to kill the snappy weed.

WHISTLE — Found on screen ?? It starts the Avalanch on screen 135, and the rocks fall to block the water which in turn stops the waterfall, therefore giving access to the caves behind.

GRAVE DIGGERS SPADE — Found in the graveyard, screen 125. It is used to dig up the pirates treasure chest.

TREASURE MAP — You need to find this to find the treasure.

SLEEPING POTION — To get on board the Pirate ship you have to have a conversation with Blackheart, he'll let you on board if you have a treasure map and a spade. However the only way to actually come away with the treasure youself is to put him to sleep, and steal it.

TELESCOPE — Use this and you will be able to navigate your way to the desert island. Without using it you just drift around at sea.

SOME COINS — Drawn as one object, ie as a pile to pick up all in one go, using only one slot to hold them.

» Philip Oliver's design document was incredibly detailed, although very fewv of the ideas were carried into the game.

▶ remember using a map editor on the ST for the screens, but the name escapes me."

Dave coded the CPC and Spectrum versions while Craig worked exclusively on the C64. "To play to the strengths of each machine, such as the enhanced graphics and audio on the CPC, we had to spend time in those areas," Dave says. But since the Spectrum version was generally ahead in terms of development, Craig could base his game on it. "The C64 version was built from the ground up because the CPU was different, so you couldn't just port the code but Craig used the Spectrum version as a kind of living design and added his own embellishments, with the visuals and audio also created from the ground up," Dave explains.

There were, inevitably, some challenges. "Fitting a bigger-feeling game into 8-bit limits was always hard and when you're changing the feel of a beloved franchise, you're always taking a risk with the diehard fans," Dave admits. But, as time went on, the game began to take shape, and as with all of the other *Dizzy* titles, *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* revolved around a story, interactions with the Yolkfolk and puzzles.

The game used the plot outlined in Philip's design document. In essence, the treasures of the Prophet Zeffer had vanished from their sacred shrine (which was fleshed out as the temple of the Crystal Kingdom), prompting Grand Dizzy to believe the end of the world was nigh. Rather than

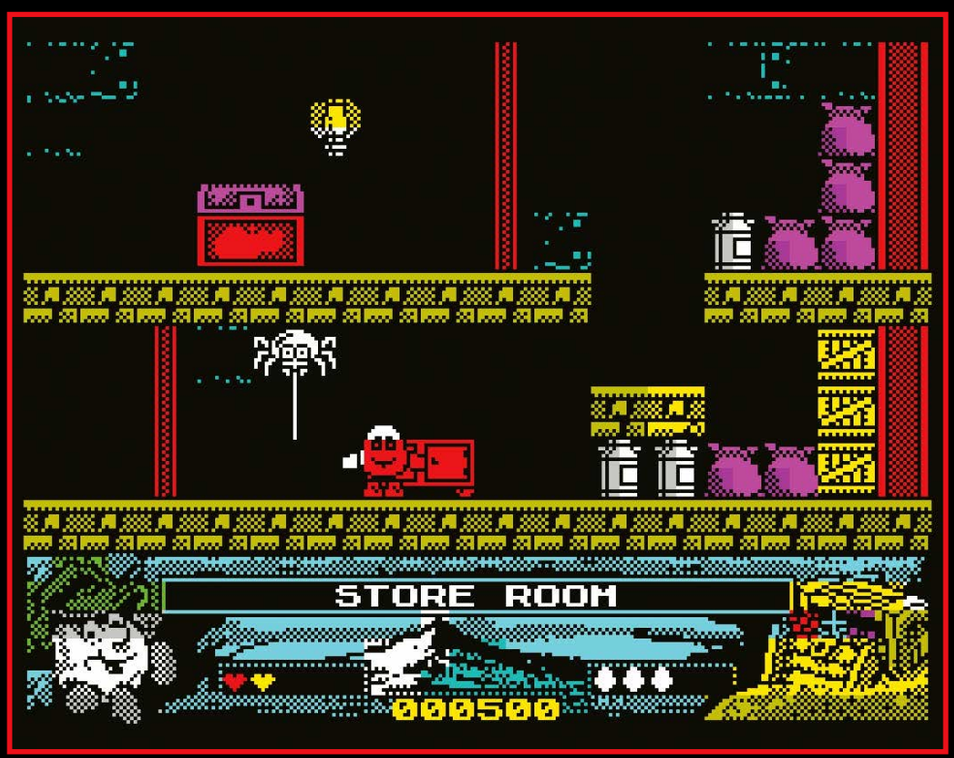
plunge Dizzy's world under the eternal shadow of darkness, the little egg hero was tasked with finding and returning a crystal sword, chalice and crown.

To succeed, Dizzy needed to chat with the Yolkfolk to discover what predicament they were in, find objects and work out how they should be used. In *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy*, most of the puzzles were straightforward and logical enough but there were a few curve balls too. Getting into Daisy's house wasn't as easy as you'd imagine, for example. After berating Dizzy for leaving her bedroom a mess, he had to find his way inside – doing so via the window. Once in, he could collect an object – a whip next to the bed. Nudge, nudge, wink, wink!

> "THE TEAM WANTED TO START FRESH RATHER THAN REUSE EXISTING EDITORS, MAPS OR ASSETS"
> PHILIP OLIVER

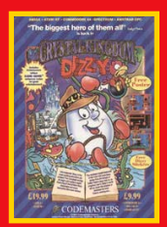
Along the way, Dizzy would plunge underwater and explore a pirate ship which, along with a desert island, featured in Philip's original design document. Dizzy also bumped into CJ, star of Codemasters' *CJ's Elephant Antics* and there was a cameo, too, for a character who resembled Richard O'Brien from Channel 4's game show *The Crystal Maze*. Reviewers were mixed in their assessment of this melting pot of ideas with some believing the game to be too easy and others finding certain parts left them stumped. "It's a fair assessment," says Dave. "We wanted to widen the appeal, because a high price point was a risk and we wanted it to appeal to more players. This meant that naturally some puzzles were more straightforward. At the same time, *Dizzy* fans expected a few head scratchers. So you ended up with a mix, where some things felt obvious once you'd see them, and some things felt obscure until the penny dropped."

Versions were also created for the Amiga and Atari ST by Reflective Designs. These were based on Visual Impact's designs but expanded upon to suit the extra capabilities of the 16-bits. Free of memory restrictions, the dialogue was expanded, for instance, so the characters felt more alive. "I wasn't involved hands-on with the 16-bit versions and I didn't play them but I've always found it interesting seeing how things translate when you're no longer fighting the same technical constraints," Dave says. The game, on the whole, was generally well received by critics and Dave says the team felt privileged to have been working on such a successful franchise. "*Dizzy* has a kind of lasting charm which is almost *Mario*-esque, and it's the kind of game where everyone remembers the puzzle they got stuck on and talked about at school," he says. "Obviously, you also have to give huge respect to the Olivers. They really knew what they were doing, what they wanted to create, and how it would resonate with players." ★



CRYSTAL-CLEAR CRITICISM

THE OLIVER TWINS WANTED SOME CHANGES

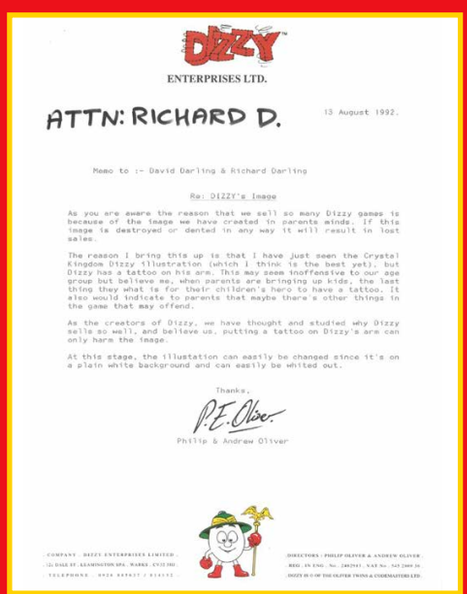


Although Philip and Andrew Oliver weren't directly involved in the development of *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy*, they still had some input. "We spoke with the Olivers at various points and they gave great advice, but they also gave us a lot of freedom," says Dave Thompson from Visual Impact.

Even so, the Olivers took a look at late versions of the game and they weren't entirely happy. In November 1992, Philip wrote six pages of comments and recommendations for the Spectrum and Amstrad versions. He believed the title screen to be "very bland", felt Dizzy span too fast and that the characters (except the Yolkfolk) needed to be twice as big.

He also looked to bring the 8-bit versions into line with the 16-bit versions by displaying who was talking and making changes to the text file. Not that the 16-bit versions were perfect. Philip also wrote a detailed analysis of the Amiga conversion, keen to ensure the game was as good as it could be. It showed how rigorously the *Dizzy* games were tested and how much the Olivers cared.

This extended to concern that Dizzy was being illustrated with a tattoo on his arm. "This may seem inoffensive to our age group but believe me, when parents are bringing up kids, the last thing they want is for their children's hero to have a tattoo," the brothers wrote in a memo to Codemasters. The tattoo was removed but it remained on the advert.



DIZZY
ENTERPRISES LTD.

ATTN: RICHARD D.

13 August 1992.

Memo to :- David Darling & Richard Darling

Re: DIZZY's Image

As you are aware the reason that we sell so many Dizzy games is because of the image we have created in parents minds. If this image is destroyed or dented in any way it will result in lost sales.

The reason I bring this up is that I have just seen the Crystal Kingdom Dizzy illustration (which I think is the best yet), but Dizzy has a tattoo on his arm. This may seem inoffensive to our age group but believe me, when parents are bringing up kids, the last thing they want is for their children's hero to have a tattoo, it also would indicate to parents that maybe there's other things in the game that may offend.

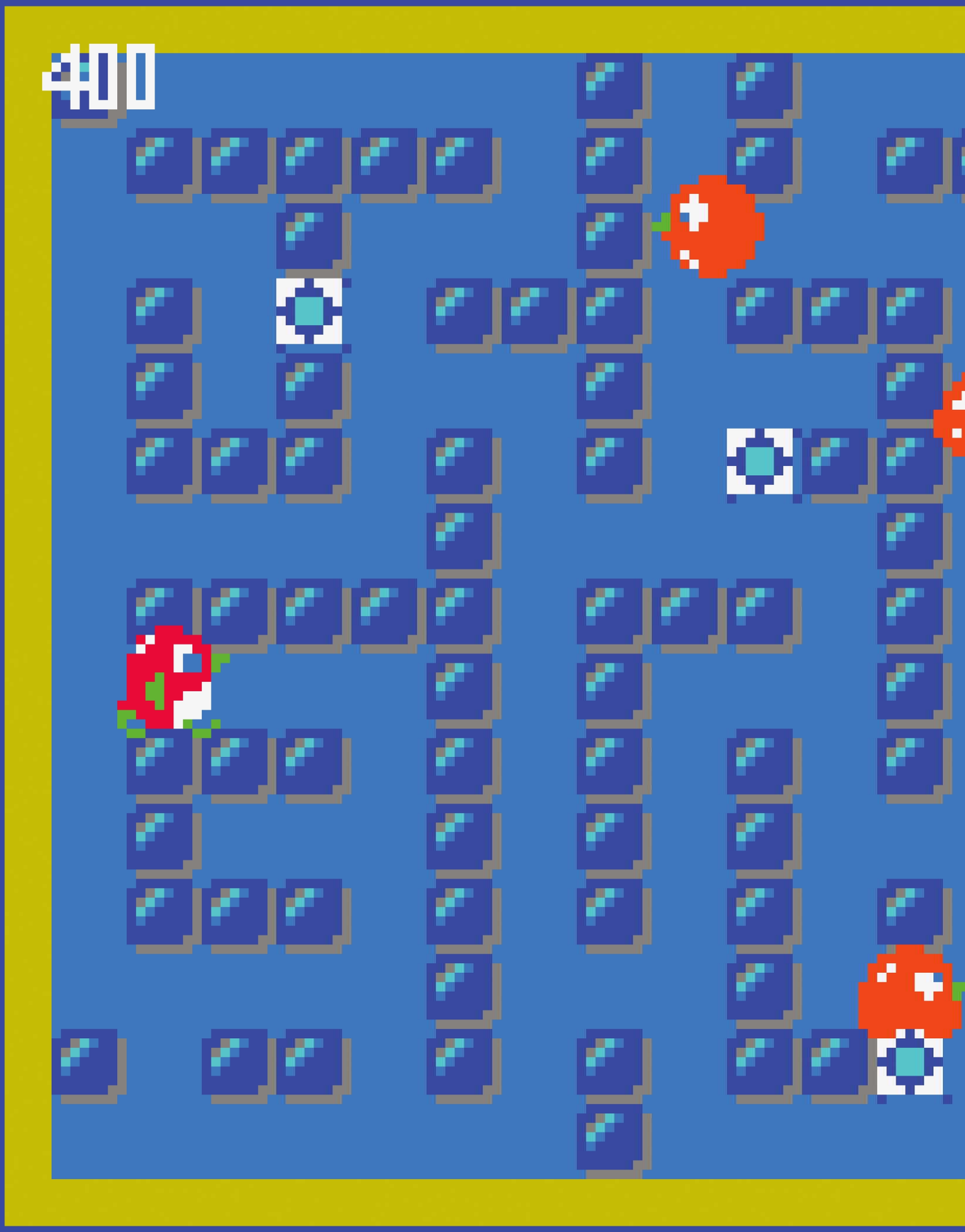
As the creators of Dizzy, we have thought and studied why Dizzy sells so well, and believe us, putting a tattoo on Dizzy's arm can only harm the image.

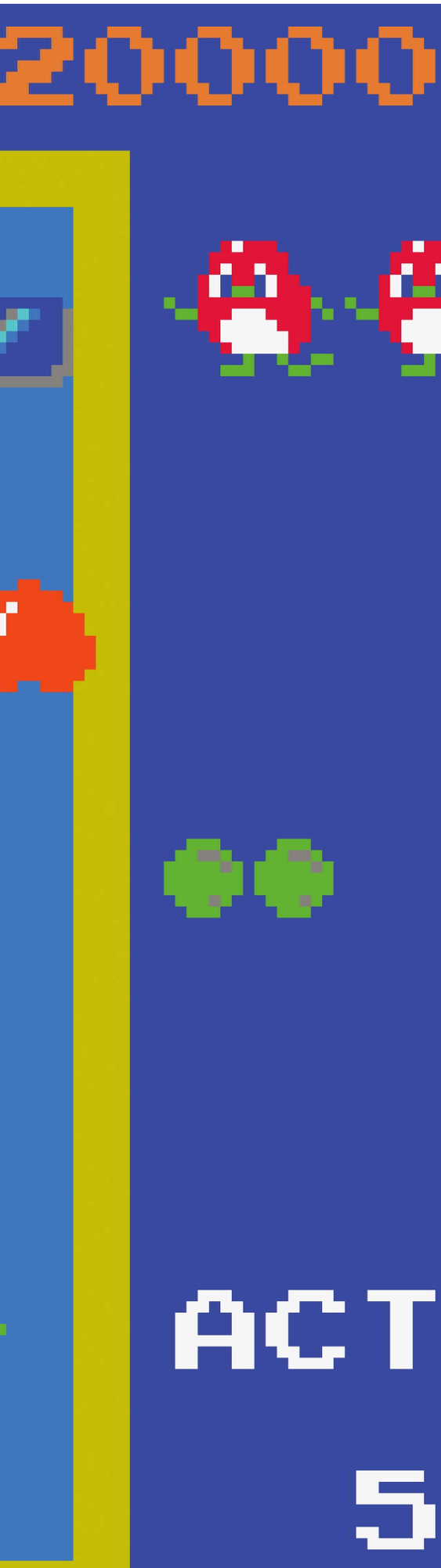
At this stage, the illustration can easily be changed since it's on a plain white background and can easily be whited out.

Thanks,

P.E.Oliver.

Philip & Andrew Oliver





Pengo

PICK UP A PENGUIN

» RETROREVIVAL

» GAME GEAR » 1990 » SEGA R&D2

Nick had a lot of games and one of the last things I did for him and his parents was to sort through his collection to find everything of value in case his family ever wanted to move it on. As a thank you I was able to take home a number of games, nothing really of great worth, but largely stuff that I knew had either meant a lot to Nick, or we had often played together.

One of the games that first caught my eye as I was sorting out a box of cartridges was *Pengo*. It's a game I know that Nick loves, not just because he's mentioned it in the magazine but because he's told me about the many different versions he owned.

I added it to my box, which included everything from *Balan Wonderworld* and *Jambo Safari* to *The Red Star* and *Last Bronx*. The following weekend I booted it up for a play. It's a very Nick game and that's not just because it features puzzle aspects and penguins.

Nick was always impressed with clever conversions, particularly those that played to its hardware's strengths and *Pengo* does a good job at converting the narrow play area of the arcade game's screen to the wider orientation of the Game Gear.

There are small variations between the original layouts and the Game Gear offering, but they still feel authentic, making it perfect for playing on the go. The actual play mechanics of the game remain great too, and it's extremely satisfying pegging it around the screen and slamming Sno-bees with heavy ice blocks.

Nick loved a good puzzle game, particularly if there was a two-player component to it and while *Pengo* lacks that aspect, it remains a good example of the genre, even if it leans more towards the maze genre.

I've had a lot of fun playing *Pengo* lately, not just because it's a good game, but because it evokes strong memories of my relationship with Nick and that's something I definitely want to hold on to because he meant so much to me. *

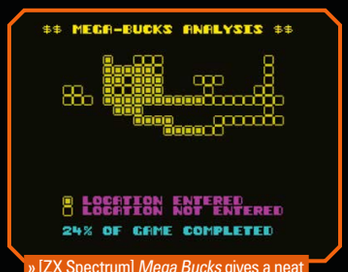
Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

FIREBIRD BUDGET GAMES

Alongside rivals Mastertronic, Firebird dominated the 8-bit budget market during the Eighties. As a result, there are plenty of games from the publisher that you may have missed. Retro Gamer takes a look at some of those games across several systems. How many did you play?

Words by Graeme Mason



» [ZX Spectrum] *Mega Bucks* gives a neat summary of progress at the end of each game.

» [ZX Spectrum] Rock's first task is to turn off the alarm.

MEGA BUCKS

■ DEVELOPER: **MBD, IVAN HORN, ANDREW DEAKIN** ■ YEAR: **1986**

■ ***Mega Bucks* is a game of high stakes and improbable names.** You are Rock Carrington, nephew of the eccentric professor, Maxibillion III. Maxibillion's snuffed it and, with no direct descendants, has left all of his fortune to you. But there's a catch [of course there is – Ed]. Being the eccentric professor type, your uncle can't just hand over the cash. That wouldn't be much of a game, would it? No, he's hatched an elaborate plan involving his huge mansion, locked rooms, copious puzzles and a bunch of weird objects that may or may not assist Rock in locating the hidden item that unlocks his fortune.

Propelled by the success of series such as *Wally Week* and *Magic Knight*, object manipulation arcade adventures became big business on the Spectrum during the second half of the Eighties. As is typical of the genre, the player isn't given much information, leaving them to rely on trial-and-error gameplay, despite some cryptic messages from Maxibillion. As Rock arrives at his uncle's mansion, the alarm's going off, only there's no sound, just the blinking unit outside the building. So, Rock's first task is to deactivate it, using a combination of the Levitation Crystal (there's no jumping in *Mega Bucks*) and the Remote Control. Fail to perform this task in time, and the alarm actually does sound, and the mansion releases a deadly gas, killing Rock instantly. Not very friendly, old Maxibillion, was he? Once Rock negotiates this hazard, he can get on with his mission, discovering his uncle's message and locating the videotape that releases his golden fortune.

Mega Bucks' cover eschews its forebears' plain white covers with cartoonish art, an excited Rock Carrington (at odds with the muscled figure on the game's loading screen) clutching fistfuls of cash as he jumps for joy. Released as part of Firebird's new Silver Range, it followed in the wake of its initial burst of games in Autumn 1986. Issue 34 of *Crash* magazine contained five Silver Range games, including the hits *Thrust* and *Olli & Lissa*. But when *Mega Bucks* appeared

several months later, it met with muted enthusiasm (apart from *Your Sinclair*'s Marcus 'Berks' Berkmann, who loved it), despite its full-price grade presentation, graphics and gameplay.

As was common with budget games, there was little advertising, with publishers letting their price points do the selling. Retailing for £1.99, *Mega Bucks* offered excellent value for money, a sprawling arcade adventure with bright, distinctive graphics, inventory management, novel gameplay, and some baffling but logical puzzles to solve.

While unlikely to satisfy shoot-'em-up fans, there was plenty on offer for anyone who loved the antics of Wally Week, Dizzy or Magic Knight.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE

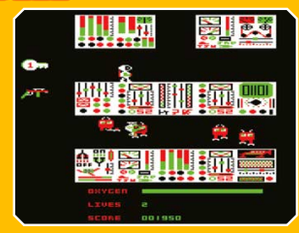
Martin Sherlock, 1986

■ Framed for pinching the headmaster's wallet, this arcade adventure stars an unnamed schoolchild seeking to avoid the end-of-term blues – and a caning. Wander the side-on locations, pick up and combine items, and hopefully clear your name before the term ends.

STAR SLAYER [C64]

Jason Kendall, Wally Beben, 1987

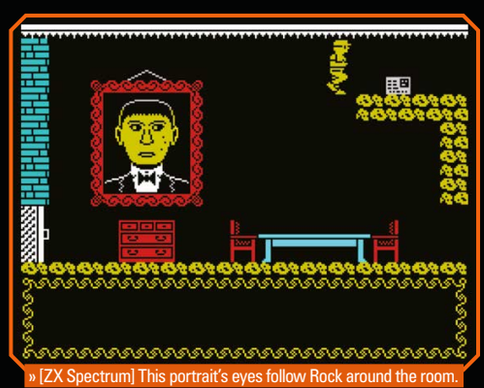
■ This run-and-gun game is notable for its superb Wally Beben music, and the rest of what's on offer isn't bad, either. *Star Slayer* is attractive, fun and very easy to play. It's admittedly a rather simple game at its heart, albeit one that requires a fair bit of exploration. If you're never heard of it before we definitely recommend a play.



STAR DRIFTER [BBC MICRO]

Timothy Wilkinson, John Day, 1986

■ This sprawling maze game is one of a decent selection released on the BBC Micro by Firebird. You're a brave astronaut, sent on an odyssey to investigate a mysterious abandoned spacecraft. Naturally, there's a bunch of aliens who don't take too kindly to your arrival.

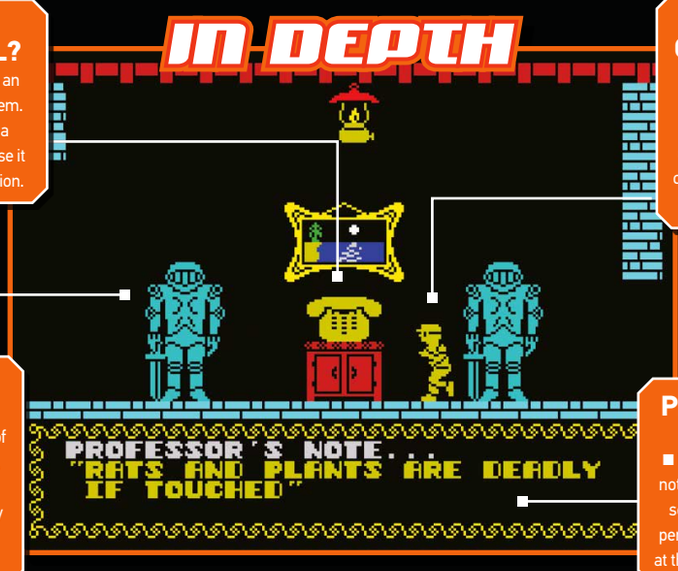


» [ZX Spectrum] This portrait's eyes follow Rock around the room.

THAT WAS PRETTY SILLY ! WALKING IN TO 1 MILLION VOLTS HAS TURNED YOU IN TO WHAT LOOKS LIKE A SHRIVELLED UP CHIP
PROFESSOR'S NOTE...
"USEFUL CRATES OPEN WITH THE RIGHT TOOL"

» [ZX Spectrum] A nasty sudden death for Rock.

IN DEPTH



WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

■ *Mega Bucks* features an unusual fast-travel system. When Rock discovers a phone number, he can use it to transport to that location.

ROCK CARRINGTON

■ The baseball cap-wearing star of the game trudges around each screen, picking up objects and exploring the mysterious mansion.

MEGA KNIGHTS

■ Perhaps a nod to one of *Mega Bucks*' influences, these suits of armour, and many other similarly ornate items, litter Maxibillion's abode.

PROFESSOR'S NOTES

■ Pick up the Professor's notes, and helpful (and not so helpful) hints appear periodically in this window at the bottom of the screen.

■ To watch gameplay of many of these games, check out the witchfinder1976 channel on YouTube. To read developer interviews and more, **Retro Gamer** freelancer Richard Hewison's *Memories Of Firebird* is highly recommended, available from Amazon.

Minority Report

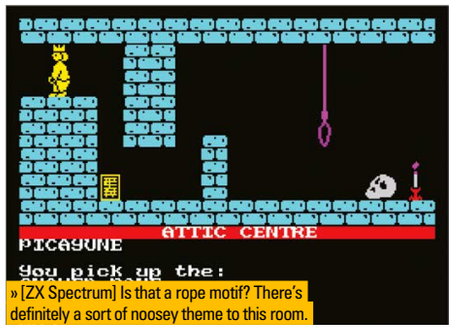
KING'S KEEP

■ DEVELOPER: **IAN WRIGHT** ■ YEAR: **1986**

■ **Like in *Mega Bucks*, there's a vengeful relative at the heart of *King's Keep*, only this time it's your pops – and he's not dead.** The unsubtly named King Harold The Heartless rules his kingdom with a grip of iron, and this extends to a rather frosty father-son relationship. It appears that King Harold's offspring takes after his mother's side, sympathising with the poor downtrodden subjects who feel the constant boot of the king on their necks. The king realises this, banishing his son to prison, the cold and dark keep of the title, from which few escape. Stuck in the oubliette, the player joins the brave son at this point, ready to help him break out and instigate a peasants' revolution.

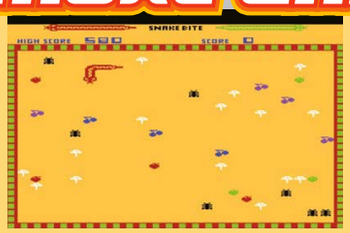
Budget arcade adventures such as *King's Keep* proved excellent value for money. Once he's athletically escaped the oubliette, junior scurries around the keep bargaining with guards and other NPCs. You can chat with each via a drop-down menu, which usually reveals a request for a specific item. Objects lay scattered around the keep; examining, combining and giving them to the correct character moves you a step closer to freedom. Moving around the keep is painless, with no punishment save for when you carelessly wander into a forbidden area, and *King's Keep*'s tight levels ensure that, even using trial and error, it's an enjoyable and undemanding budget game.

» [ZX Spectrum] Help the jester and he may help you.



» [ZX Spectrum] Is that a rope motif? There's definitely a sort of noosey theme to this room.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» SNAKE BITE

■ DEV: **ALAN KEEL**
■ YEAR: **1984**

■ **The snake genre is almost as old as videogaming itself, yet it retains its appeal to this day.** Released by Firebird in its original packaging as part of its first tranche, *Snake Bite* is a rather entertaining BBC Micro game that's played at five speeds, ranging from interminably slow to breakneck fast. It's a visually appealing game and gets increasingly more difficult as your hungry snake grows in size.

» SHARK

■ DEV: **MR MICRO (GREG DUDDLE)**
■ YEAR: **1986**

■ **Also known as *Shark Attack*, *Shark* is another straightforward arcade game, this time for the Commodore 16.** Coded by Greg Duddle, you're a scuba diver, trapped in the depths as sharks patrol above. The way to the surface is to kill the creature with your spear gun, before the level repeats, only with further sea creatures to deal with. *Shark* is a well-produced game for the C16, with a truly outstanding cover.

» BIRD STRIKE

■ DEV: **ANDREW FRIGAARD**
■ YEAR: **1984**

■ **This early Firebird release holds a lot of affection for BBC Micro owners, especially those harbouring a grudge against the humble pigeon.** It's World War I, and you're defending Blighty from an aerial assault. Tip the wings of the oncoming fighters with your cannon, and a stray carrier pigeon flutters away. Shooting it reveals a note to a tune. Revealing the entire tune moves you to the next stage. [That's a lot of dead pigeons – Ed]

» THRUST

■ DEV: **JAMES SOFTWARE**
■ YEAR: **1986**

■ **This *Gravitar*-inspired game became Firebird's tent pole budget release in 1986, achieving fame and high scores on the C64 and Spectrum, following the BBC Micro original by Superior Software.** James Software was on porting duties for this Atari 8-bit version, and it's just as playable, despite the weirdly broad player craft. With several planets to explore and master, it's brilliant value for money.

WARHAWK

■ DEVELOPER: **ANDREW BETTS** WITH MUSIC BY **ROB HUBBARD**
■ YEAR: **1986**

■ This crunching shoot-'em-up appeared in several guises during 1986 (although it curiously failed to appear on the ZX Spectrum), and even got a glossy Atari ST port two years later. It's the impressive Atari 8-bit version we're focussing on here, however. Like the other versions, there's a wafer-thin plot to get you going. Marauding hordes of aliens threaten our galaxy, leaving humankind no choice but to send in the powerful Warhawk fighter to intercept, inevitably with you at the helm.

Scrolling vertically across a series of metallic and organic levels, the Warhawk engages enemies with its powerful lasers, taking out flying and ground-based targets alike, while dodging the occasional meteor storm. Once it reaches the end of an area, a squadron of enemy craft descends on the Warhawk; defeat these, and it's on to the next base until you've neutralised the alien threat. The player has only one life and relies on an energy bar made of horizontal triangles to survive across the game's many zones.

While far from the most complex shoot-'em-up for the Atari 8-bit, *Warhawk* is a professionally produced game of mayhem and destruction, offering plenty of colourful thrills to Atari action fans, from its glitzy title screen – complete with smoothly scrolling stars – to another toe-tapping Rob Hubbard tune.

» [Atari 8-bit] *Warhawk* takes out a ground installation while preparing to dodge those two flying enemies.

» [Atari 8-bit] It's vital to ensure you have enough energy to endure each end-of-level assault.

RETRO STINKER
» DON'T BUY THIS

■ DEVELOPER: UNKNOWN ■ YEAR: 1985

■ What else? It may be tongue-in-cheek, but each game is dire, especially *Race Ace* and *Fruit Machine*, with only the two *Fido* games offering anything more than a few seconds of play.

» MICKEY THE BRICKY

■ DEV: **DAVID TONG**
■ YEAR: **1985**

■ Inspired by *Donkey Kong* and the popular platform genre in general, *Mickey The Bricky* is one of two exclusive VIC-20 budget games from Firebird. It's an uncomplicated game, with few frills, and a frustrating jump mechanic that requires perfect timing. Once mastered, however, there's plenty of enjoyment, despite a 'tune' that becomes very tiresome, very quickly.

» SCUBA KIDZ

■ DEV: **ANDREW BETTS, WALLY BEBEN**
■ YEAR: **1988**

■ Competition in the budget market was high by 1988, with original titles mixing with re-releases, making it common for games to get lost in the shuffle of cut-price software. Released on the Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC and ZX Spectrum, *Scuba Kidz* is one of Silverbird's easier games, putting you in the flippers of a young diver searching for your friends. Numerous sea creatures predictably take umbrage.

» THE EXTIRPATOR

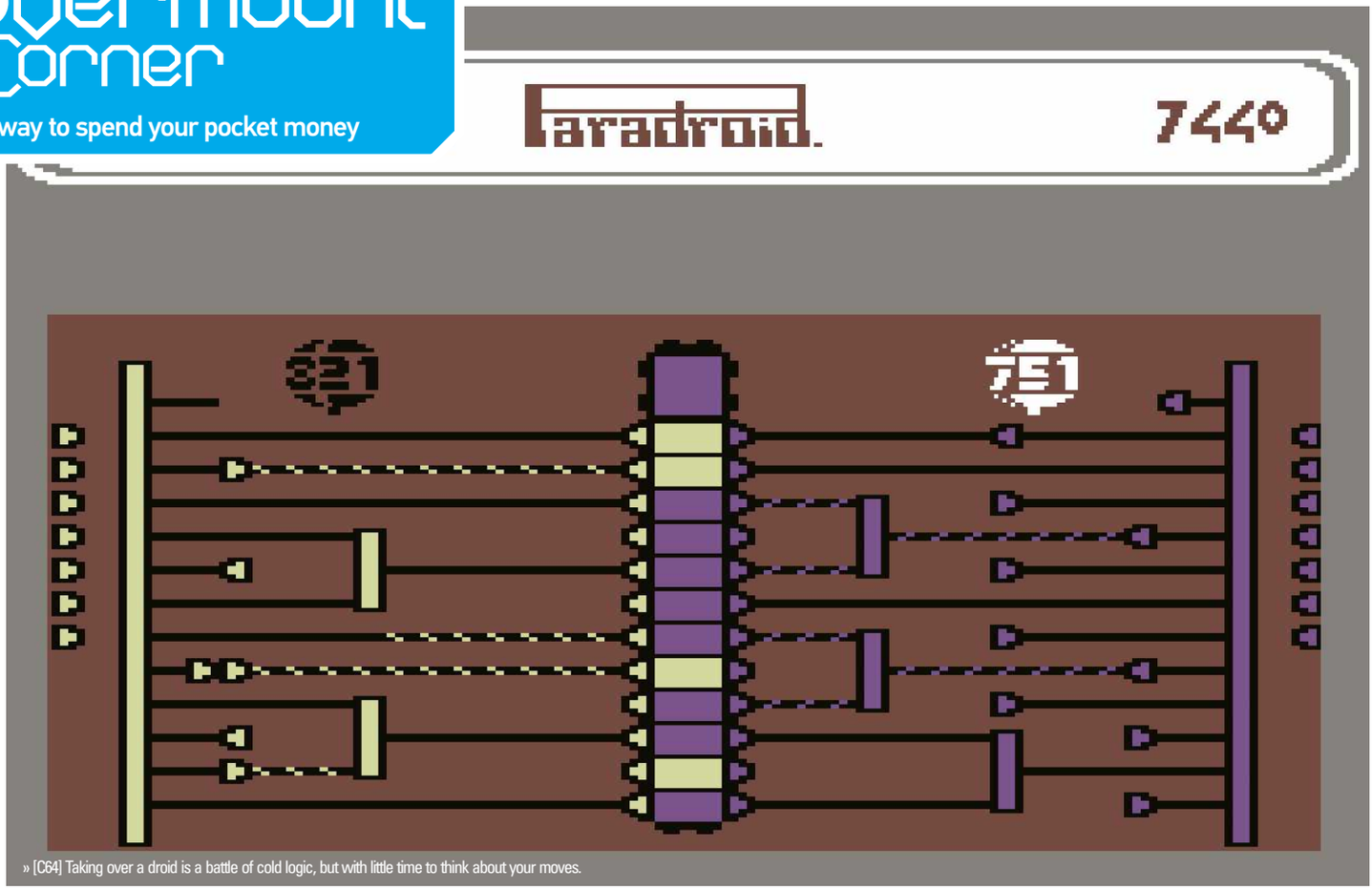
■ DEV: **GARY RIMMER, CAL LEWIN**
■ YEAR: **1988**

■ This is a strange Atari 8-bit release, more tech demo than game, but a damn impressive one nonetheless. *The Extirpator* (apparently meaning someone who destroys completely, ie, an exterminator) is the player character, travelling from left to right and eliminating the numerous meanies in front of them. There's some sleek parallax scrolling which helps combat the slow gameplay, and that tune sounds familiar…

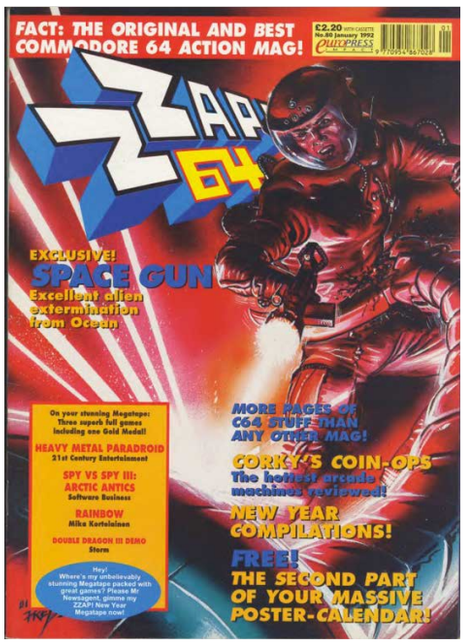
» MISSION GENOCIDE

■ DEV: **PAUL SHIRLEY**
■ YEAR: **1987**

■ Developed by the cryptic Drinksoft (actually the work of Paul '*Spindizzy*' Shirley), *Mission Genocide* is another shoot-'em-up, evocative of the Namco arcade game *Xevious*. There's little variety to its gameplay beyond shooting and bombing, but what it does, it does very well, making it good value for cash-strapped Amstrad CPC owners looking for a bit of blasting action.



» [C64] Taking over a droid is a battle of cold logic, but with little time to think about your moves.



ZZAP!64 MAGAZINE #80

AS WELL AS ALL THE HIDDEN GEMS, COVERTAPES SOMETIMES DELIVERED THE SPECTACULAR, SECURING MAJOR TITLES. ONE MONTH IN 1992, ZZAP!64 READERS WERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO GET ARGUABLY THE SYSTEM'S BEST GAME, ALONG WITH A HOST OF MULTIPLAYER ENTERTAINMENT

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

THIS MONTH IN JANUARY 1992

At the beginning of 1992 the C64 was still going strong, and *Zzap!64* magazine had risen from the dead following the bankruptcy of its publisher. The new incarnation of the magazine discussed rumours of the never released C65, and the A300, which would eventually appear as the Amiga 600. For the time being, this covertape certainly delivered the goods, with the incredible *Paradroid* being an essential part of any C64 library. There was also the anarchic multiplayer of *Spy Vs Spy 3*, the co-op goodness of a *Double Dragon 3* demo and *Rainbow*, a unique *Tetris* variant from a reader.

» [C64] There are many robots to choose from, but this one looks curiously familiar.

THE MAIN EVENT: PARADROID

Paradroid was Graftgold's robot-hunting masterpiece. Highly original, and somewhat genre defying, you fight your way through a series of spaceships, with decks connected by lifts and a small army of robots spread across them.

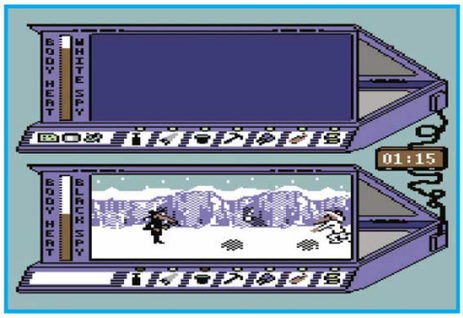
The aim is to clear them all out, but there's a twist. As well as just shooting, you have to use your Influence Device to take over other robots, working your way up to bigger, better and more destructive droids.

You do this by hacking their microcircuits, which has its own subgame. Here, you place pulsars which fire beams at central squares, hopefully claiming them. If you get more than your victim, you transfer into their body, and their weapons are yours.

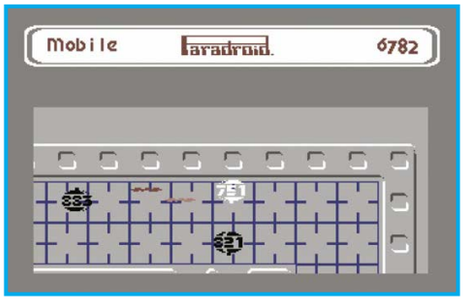
Different robots have different capabilities, so switching can mean an upgrade, or a downgrade. Each robot has a number. Some are fast. Some have guns worth risking your life for. Learning which to target is highly beneficial.

There's line of sight, too. Enemies only appear if your robot can see them, adding to the tension. There's always the risk of a bigger, deadlier robot lurking around each corner.

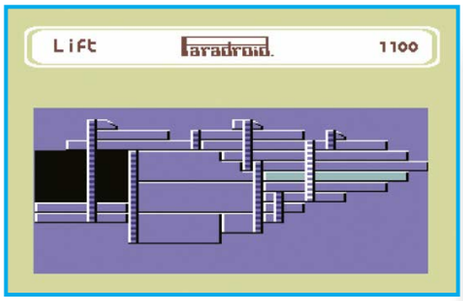
Paradroid is big, deep and, like many 8-bit greats, it turns its few simple mechanics into magic. The longer you survive the riskier things get. Robots don't last long, which means



» [C64] Snowball fights can freeze you to death, but you can warm yourself in a nearby igloo.



» [C64] A tight exchange of fire, but we're outnumbered here.



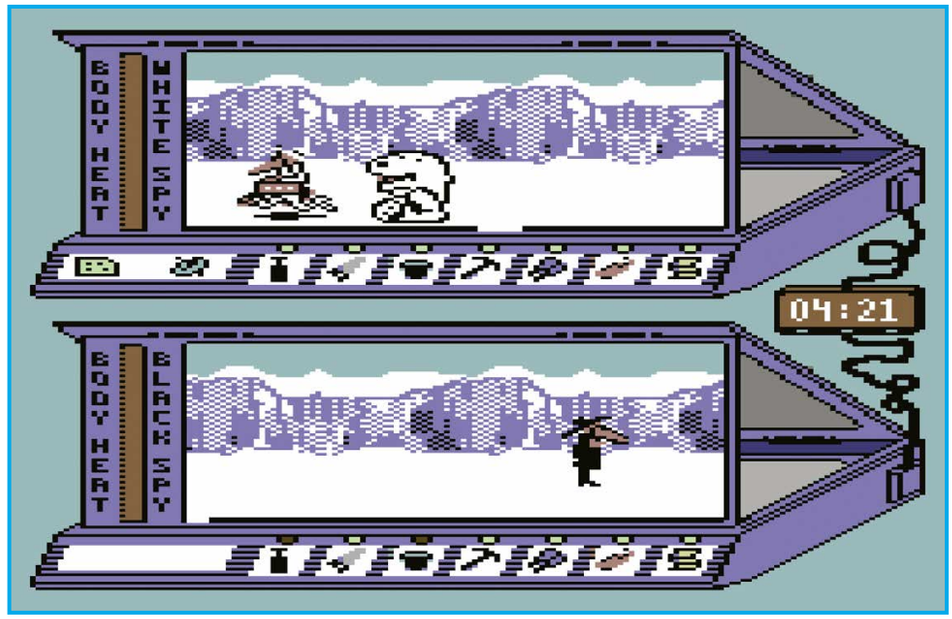
» [C64] Lifts connect the many decks you need to clear to liberate the ship.

sticking with a favourite isn't an option. You'll need to plan your route to conquest, ensuring you have a few options should your bot run out of energy in a far flung corner of the ship.

Paradroid is one of those games that's still unlike anything else, except perhaps its Graftgold sibling, *Quazatron*. It will take many attempts, but beating a ship is a victory every C64 owner should aspire to.

PLAY THIS NEXT: SPY VS SPY 3: ARCTIC ANTICS

The third entry in First Star Software's *Spy Vs Spy* series moves the action to the Arctic, giving you a new range of tools and traps to defeat the enemy agent. You can hunt down the items necessary to launch the hidden intergalactic rocket and win the game, or you can set traps, like dynamite, falling icicles and tricky ice holes, to hinder your opponent. Failing that, you can just lob snowballs at each other. A madcap, competitive arcade adventure, it's baffling at first, but figuring out what you can do is part of the fun. *Spy Vs Spy* was perfect living room multiplayer, quick, a bit of a laugh, and the bane of many a younger sibling with no idea how to play it. ✱



» [C64] Try to launch the rocket prematurely, and this polar bear will block your victory.

Covermount HIGHLIGHTS

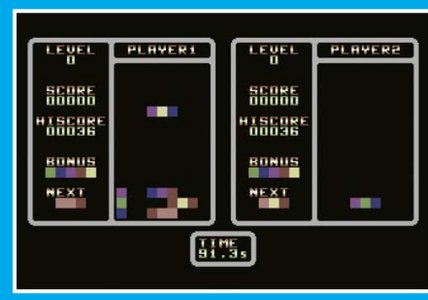
THE BEST OF THE REST

DOUBLE DRAGON 3 DEMO

■ The *Double Dragon* series was always a crowd pleaser, and the Sales Curve brought the third of Technōs' classic brawlers to the C64. Opening with Andrew Taylor's fantastic intro music, the game has Billy and Jimmy jetting round the world, with the demo giving you the first stage, America. Although it's a brief demo there are plenty of baddies to plough through, and you have a wide selection of moves. There's a spinning jump kick to complement the handy flying kick and you can vault over enemies too. There's also a shop with various extras to purchase. Always better in two player, *Double Dragon* is perfect when you fancy a quick bit of virtual bother, and the game scored 73% in the magazine.

RAINBOW

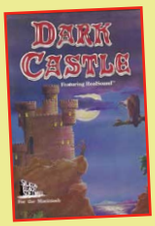
■ This novel *Tetris* variant by Mika Kortelainen puts a different twist on the classic puzzle formula, with coloured blocks falling down that you can match horizontally to make them disappear. There's more though. Firstly, there's a bonus combination of colours that you can match for extra points, but the real secret is to make rainbow lines, which clear the entire board. Getting the hang of that is a game changer, letting you rack up points and survive long term. There are also different game modes, with a timed score attack complementing the standard play until you are run out of room mode. There's also variable difficulty and a two player option. This is a solid puzzler, once you figure out its quirks.



THE MAKING OF DARK CASTLE

IT'S BEEN FOUR DECADES SINCE PRINCE DUNCAN FIRST STEPPED INTO THE OMINOUS GREAT HALL OF DARK CASTLE TO CHALLENGE THE BLACK KNIGHT. DESIGNER AND ARTIST MARK PIERCE, PROGRAMMER JONATHAN GAY AND AUDIO PROGRAMMER AND PRODUCER ERIC ZOCHER HELP US SEE THE LIGHT

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SILICON BEACH SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** SILICON BEACH SOFTWARE
- **PLATFORM:** APPLE MACINTOSH, VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM ADVENTURE

To say not many people know how famous *Dark Castle* is sounds like an oxymoron. This is a title that wowed gamers of the day, that looked and played like no other and stayed in *MacWorld* magazine's best seller list for over three years. The series has sold over one million copies over multiple platforms and even the *Doom* guy himself, John Romero, who worked on the Apple IIGS conversion, describes it as "the coolest game made on the Mac". Yet it's quite likely that you, dear reader, have never played the ground-breaking original, because of the computer it was made for. "We sold maybe 300,000 copies of *Dark Castle* and the sequel, plus it was heavily pirated because it had, like, no copy protection," grins the game's designer and artist Mark Pierce. "At that point, there was only about a million Macs in the world. The Mac world was small but of all the titles I've done, I think more people know me for *Dark Castle* than anything else."

And Mark has done some titles you definitely will have heard of, counting *Klax*, *Pit-Fighter* and *San Francisco Rush* on his lengthy gameography, yet the limited reach of the Apple Macintosh, particularly as a game's machine, means you'd be forgiven if *Dark Castle* doesn't ring a bell. The Mac community was a tight-knit one, which is how Mark came to work on the game in the first place. Silicon Beach Software, a small developer based in San Diego, had enjoyed moderate success with its 1985 release, *Airborne!*, a simple shoot-'em-up coded by teenager Jonathan Gay. The game is notable for its impressive digitised sound, a first for the Mac, which was in stark contrast to the rather crude visuals. For its next release, company founder Charlie Jackson wanted a proper artist and his audio programmer and producer, Eric Zocher, knew just the man. Or at least, his initials.

"I came across the demo disk for Videoworks," explains Eric, referring to the Mac's pioneering art utility. "The animations were absolutely stunning and way beyond what anyone was doing in 1-bit graphics at the time. This artist was hand-building beautiful evocative animated 3D shadows with just black and white pixels at a time when no one else was attempting lighting. The animations were signed 'MSP' and I figured this must be the Mark Pierce listed in the manual. I told Charlie this guy has godlike powers and we had to hire him for our next game!"

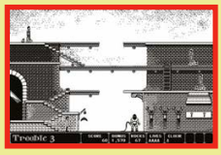
Mark, along with Jamie Fenton and Marc Canter, had indeed founded MacroMind and created a suite of seminal multimedia tools, including VideoWorks, which would evolve into

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

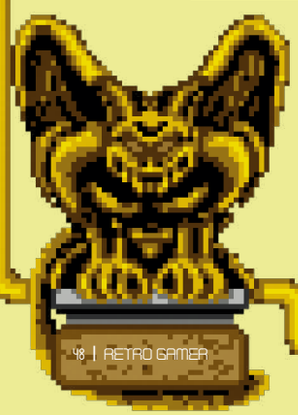
AIRBORNE!
PLATFORM: MAC
RELEASED: 1985

ROADBLASTERS (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1987

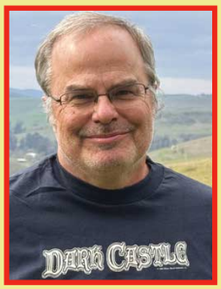
KLAX
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1990



» [Mac] That mace is going to come in handy when tackling that hooded guard…



» Designer and artist Mark Pierce worked in Atari's coin-op division and is currently head of Ludit Games.



» Programmer Jonathan Gay created the hugely popular Flash Player and is now a cattle rancher in California.

» Audio programmer Eric Zocher worked for Steve Jobs at NeXT Computer and was a VP at Adobe. He is now retired.

Macromedia, later acquired by Adobe. Charlie flew Mark from Chicago to San Diego and in the little meeting room at Silicon Beach's office, began outlining their game concepts. There was a horror game, an idea for a pirate-themed one, another based on time travel…

"I said, 'Hey, let's do a medieaval game, that crap always goes over well, right?'" says Mark, with a mischievous grin. "They had a flipchart and I started drawing rooms, like, 'Let's have Donkey Kong here and some swinging ropes from *Pitfall!* here and one with bats coming down like *Galaga* here…' I specced out the whole game. I had no plan coming into that meeting. I totally riffed it, live. And they said let's do it!"

Programmer Jonathan Gay was in the room, too, and we wonder what he made of the impromptu performance by this creative whirlwind? "I was just really excited at the opportunity to work with Mark, an actual artist and animator," he admits. "We'd spent too much time tweaking pixels to get simplistic art in my previous game *Airborne!*. That day was great but the idea that we could meet just that once and develop a game remotely seemed kind of improbable."

Working from home and online collaborations may be normal these days, but in the mid-Eighties, without broadband or even email, this was a case of Mark in Chicago designing a level, together with character graphics and animation cycles, saving them as Mac Paint files and then posting the disk to Jonathan in San Diego. And waiting. "The envelope would take a few days to get to him, he'd turn [my designs] into 68000 assembler and a few days after that, I'd get a disk back in the post from Jonathan," says Mark. "I'd play it and send back very specific instructions, like 'move that rope 17 pixels over here' or 'that's brilliant but make it faster'. People now complain to me about long compile times in Unity and I'm like, 'Oh, you have no idea.' It was crazy but it gave ▶

"I STARTED DRAWING ROOMS ON A FLIPCHART, LIKE, 'LET'S HAVE DONKEY KONG HERE AND BATS COMING DOWN LIKE GALAGA HERE…' I SPECCED OUT THE WHOLE OF DARK CASTLE. I TOTALLY RIFFED IT"
MARK PIERCE

CONVERSION CAPERS

THE QUEST TO SUCCESSFULLY PORT DARK CASTLE PROVED AN ARDUOUS ONE

AMIGA

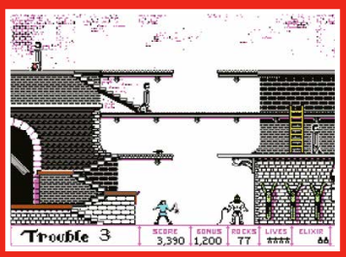
■ Developed by Three-Sixty Pacific and published by Mirrorsoft, as were the ST and C64 versions, the Amiga port understandably colourises the monochrome visuals of the original, but veers between garish and muddy, with stuttering animation, too. It's a bit of a disappointment.

ATARI ST

■ As with the Amiga version, the mouse controls of the ST help in recreating the original's aiming system, but elsewhere, the jerky character movement, awkward controls and interminably long loading times mean you'll soon want to throw yourself into the moat.

C64

■ A valiant attempt to bring *Dark Castle* to humbler hardware. The graphics and sound are decent enough and the levels cram in plenty of detail, but the frustrating multiload system and poor use of the C64's sound chip led *ZZap!64* to award this a paltry 41%.



PC (MS DOS)

■ A major element of *Dark Castle*'s appeal was the detailed, high-resolution graphics and impressive audio, which the PC port just couldn't replicate. The blocky, downgraded visuals were at least in colour, but if anything this only makes the game more of a mess.

MEGA DRIVE

■ Oh dear. Dodgy collision detection and a daft aiming system which makes Prince Duncan resemble Mick Channon celebrating a goal in 1976, make this virtually unplayable. A Retro Shamer in **Retro Gamer** 45, publishers EA should be sued for reputational damage.

CD-I

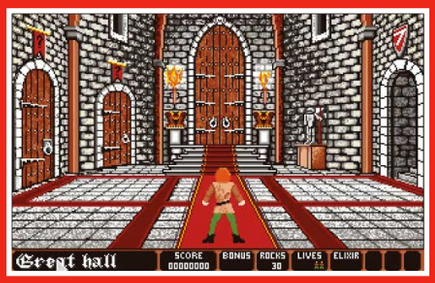
■ Released six years after the original, this version opts for scrolling levels, an ill-advised move on a console that epitomises the term. Clunky controls and a ridiculous difficulty setting mean you'll find it on The Angry Video Game Nerd channel. Enough said.

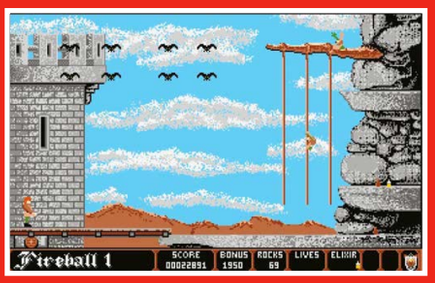
CASTLE OF DOOM GUY

JOHN ROMERO ON CONVERTING DARK CASTLE TO THE APPLE IIGS

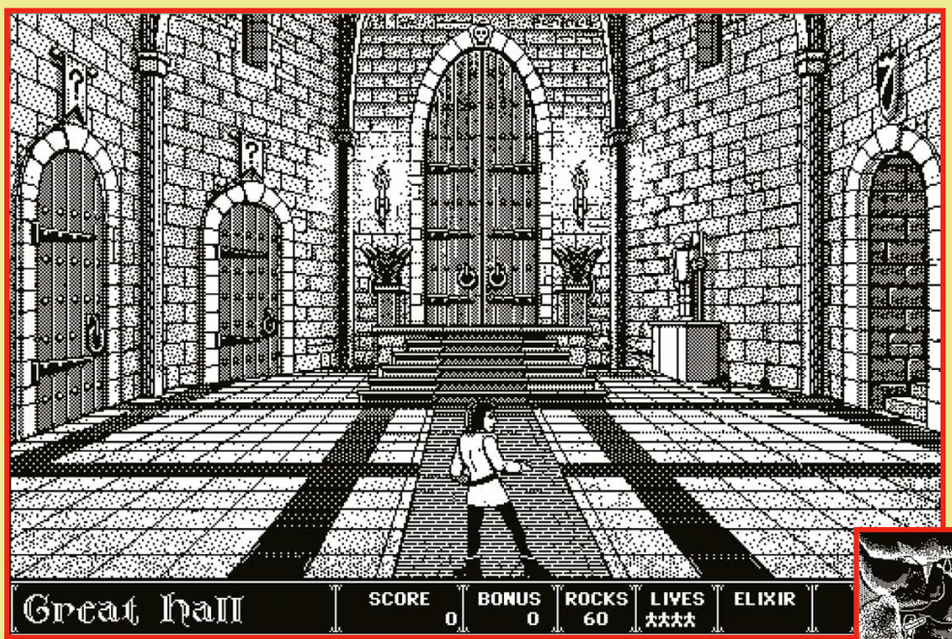
■ "It looked like no other Mac game because it used the Mac like no other game," enthuses John Romero, best known for his work on *Doom*, *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Quake*. "*Dark Castle* had smooth scrolling rooms, huge sprites, atmospheric sound effects and was very well-animated. It felt closer to an arcade game despite being on a black-and-white Mac screen. It had a unique aesthetic, was very difficult to beat, but really fun to play and using the mouse to aim and fire was so innovative. It was incredible at the time." To say John was a fan is rather stating the obvious, so when he cofounded his second start-up, Inside Out Software, he was delighted to get the contract from Three-Sixty Pacific to port *Dark Castle* to the Apple IIGS.

He hired his friend Lane Roathe to help, but after a falling out with John's cofounder, Lane quit and took the contract with him and roles were reversed. "I remade all the graphics in 256 colours, which wasn't very difficult because all the art was there. I was just helping out a friend, so when I did the credits screen, I didn't even think to put my name on it. Hilarious!"

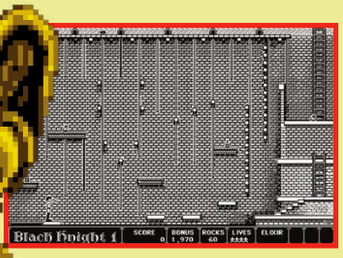


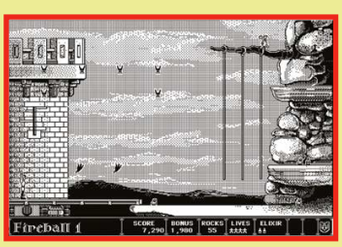


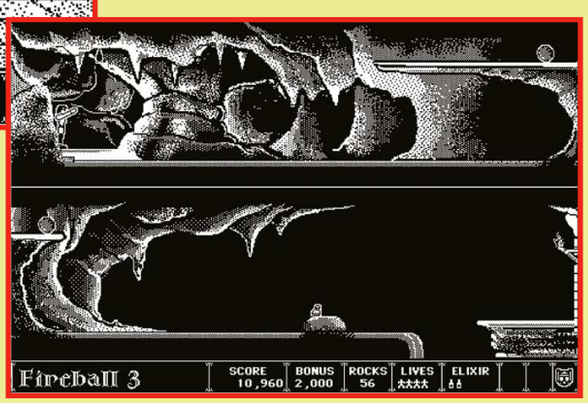
» [Apple IIGS] The Apple IIGS port of *Dark Castle* is tastefully colourised and is very playable, making it the best conversion – though the bar is admittedly low.



» [Mac] The game consisted of four areas and the Great Hall offered players a choice of which order to tackle them in, though we recommend acquiring the shield and fireball before approaching the Black Knight.







» [Mac] The caves beneath the castle are a testament to Mark's skill in creating atmospheric locations using just back and white dots.

» [Mac] The boss battle with the Black Knight is unusual in that you don't aim at him directly but must pull levers to dislodge him from his throne.

▶ me time to create all these things and to consider what was working and what wasn't. I don't think it hurt, you know?"

"It was like Christmas morning when I got a package from Mark," recalls Jonathan. "It was fun to bring the artwork to life. For playability, I mostly remember him telling me to make it harder so the player would have to earn their progress but we didn't have any significant disagreement about direction and choices in the process of building the game, which is kind of remarkable. Charlie [Jackson] gave Mark and I lots of leeway in the development process."

The pair continued with their postal service model, speeded up slightly when FedEx introduced overnight delivery halfway through *Dark Castle*'s four-month development. It seems incredible that the game contains so many elements, given its short and staccato creation, yet within its 14 distinct rooms, you'll find nods not only to the coin-ops Mark loved, but RPG and puzzle game influences, too. Using the keyboard to move and the mouse to aim and throw, you must guide the plucky hero, Prince Duncan, through dank dungeons, dodging whip-cracking torturers and collecting ammo and elixirs en route. Then scale the castle turrets, work out how to extinguish the dragon's fiery breath, locate the vital fireball and shield, and finally face the Black Knight in battle. And for much of your quest, all you have is your wits and a pocketful of pebbles.

» [Mac] Ask not for whom the bell tolls… *Dark Castle* was undeniably a brutally difficult game.

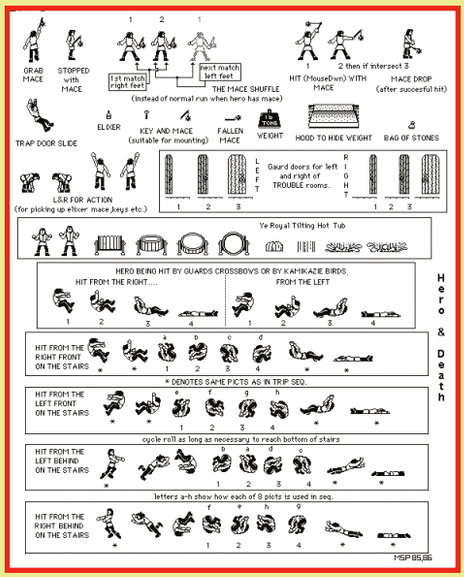
"I wanted him to be a hapless character thrown into this task," says Mark. "He doesn't have big muscles. He doesn't have superpowers. He has stones he can throw. You walk into a room, see a door or key you have to get to, and there are all these impediments. You have to work out the order you need to do things, like, first kill those bats, jump over the rats, then head for the rope but watch out for that step, that'll trip you up… there was action, but essentially it's a puzzle game."

"I TOLD MY BOSS THIS GUY MARK PIERCE HAD GODLIKE POWERS AND WE HAD TO HIRE HIM FOR OUR NEXT GAME!" ERIC ZOCHER

All of this was made infinitely more engaging by the detailed settings and beautifully animated monochrome graphics. Forty years on, the way the protagonist leaps from a swinging rope, clobbers a hooded guard with a mace and stumbles, comically dazed, after taking a hit, still impress. For the era, they felt revolutionary. We assume Mark must have carefully sketched out each frame on paper to create such smooth movement? "Nope, I drew everything using a Mac mouse, which is like a pack of cigarettes," he winks. "I'd been living and breathing VideoWorks for years so was really quick using it and I'd been doing animation since I was at art school in the Seventies. I'd studied the work of Edward Mubridge [19th century pioneer of photographing movement] and I'd presented at SIGGRAPH, a big computer graphics conference, in the early Eighties, plus I'd worked on the Mac conversion of Epyx's *Winter Games*. It all helped."

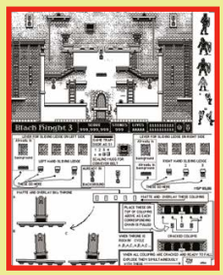
If *Dark Castle* looked like an animated cartoon, it sounded like one, too. Eric Zocher, the audio genius at Silicon Beach, used many clever tricks to produce convincing digitised samples, a first for a Mac title. "Even the original 128K Mac in 1984 had the hardware to play digital sound, but there was no software or game that had used that feature," notes Eric. "Charlie, our CEO, had been a linguistics grad student at the University Of California San Diego and got me access to a very high-end audio digitiser on a minicomputer at the university lab where they studied phonetics. I used the lab to digitise a snippet of *The Ride Of The Valkyries* and then wrote a program on the minicomputer to downsample and convert the digital sound files to the raw Mac format. I dialled-in to the minicomputer and used an acoustic modem to transfer the files to the Mac. When I played it with my little test program it was jaw-dropping. Even though it was low-fi, 8-bit, it was real music coming out of the Mac speaker that had only ever played beeps and boops before."

The dramatic music and comic sound effects undoubtedly add to the cartoon feel of the game – the 'wibble' that accompanies the Prince's headshake as he comes to after a tumble is especially memorable – and that's not just due to Eric's innovative sound driver. ▶


GRAB MACE
STOPPED with MACE
1st match right feet
next match left feet
THE MACE SHUFFLE
(instead of normal run when hero has mace)
HIT (Mouse Down) WITH MACE
MACE DROP (after successful hit)
TRAP DOOR SLIDE
ELIXER
KEY AND MACE (suitable for mounting)
FALLEN MACE
WEIGHT
HOOD TO HIDE WEIGHT
BAG OF STONES
L&R FOR ACTION (for picking up elixer mace keys etc.)
Guard doors for left and right of TROUBLE rooms.
Ye Royal Tilting Hot Tub
HERO BEING HIT BY GUARDS CROSSBOWS OR BY KAMIKAZIE BIRDS
HIT FROM THE RIGHT....
FROM THE LEFT
HIT FROM THE RIGHT FRONT ON THE STAIRS
* DENOTES SAME PICTS AS IN TRIP SEQ.
HIT FROM THE LEFT FRONT ON THE STAIRS
cycle roll as long as necessary to reach bottom of stairs
HIT FROM THE LEFT BEHIND ON THE STAIRS
letters a-h show how each of 8 picts is used in seq.
HIT FROM THE RIGHT BEHIND ON THE STAIRS
Hero & Death

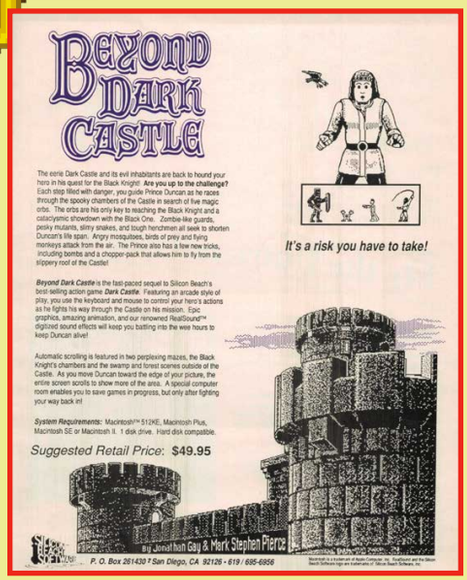
» Mark shared with us some of the original MacPaint files he sent to Jonathan to code into the game – here we have the animations for the hero being clobbered from various sides.

» Mark's designs for some of the baddies in the game – the bats, rats, zombies and hooded henchman.

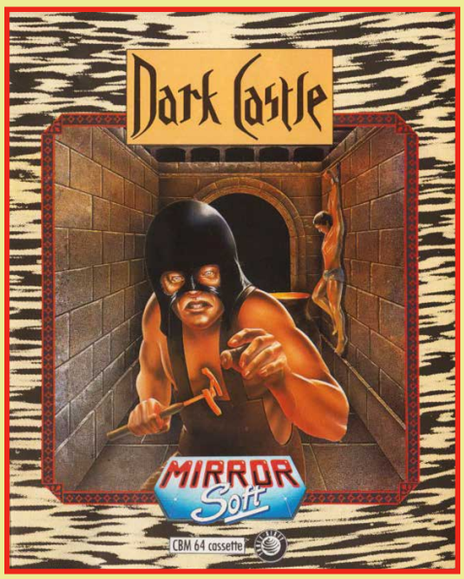


» Mark's design for the final battle with the Black Knight. He drinks heavily throughout. The Black Knight not Mark.

» *Dark Castle* T-shirts for the discerning Mac gamer.

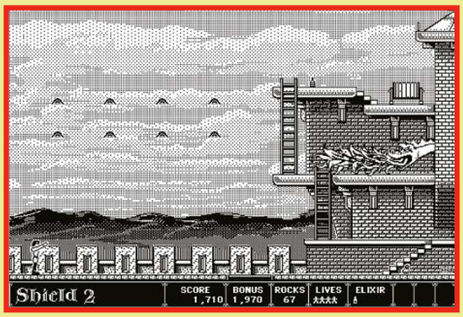

Beyond Dark Castle
It's a risk you have to take!
Suggested Retail Price: $49.95
by Jonathan Gay & Mark Stephen Pierce
P. O. Box 261430 • San Diego, CA 92126 • 619 / 695-6956

» The original advert for *Beyond Dark Castle*, boasting of 'automatic scrolling'. It was like living in the future.



» If the conversions of Dark Castle were generally awful, the box art was no better.

» The crowd around the Silicon Beach booth at the MacWorld Expo, February 1985



» [Mac] This screen, atop the battlements, is a nice mix of action, as you stone the crows, and puzzling, as you work out how to douse the dragon's flames.

» [Mac] The sequel, *Beyond Dark Castle*, added scrolling shoot-'em-up sections, where you get to don a personal heli-pack that Da Vinci would be proud of.

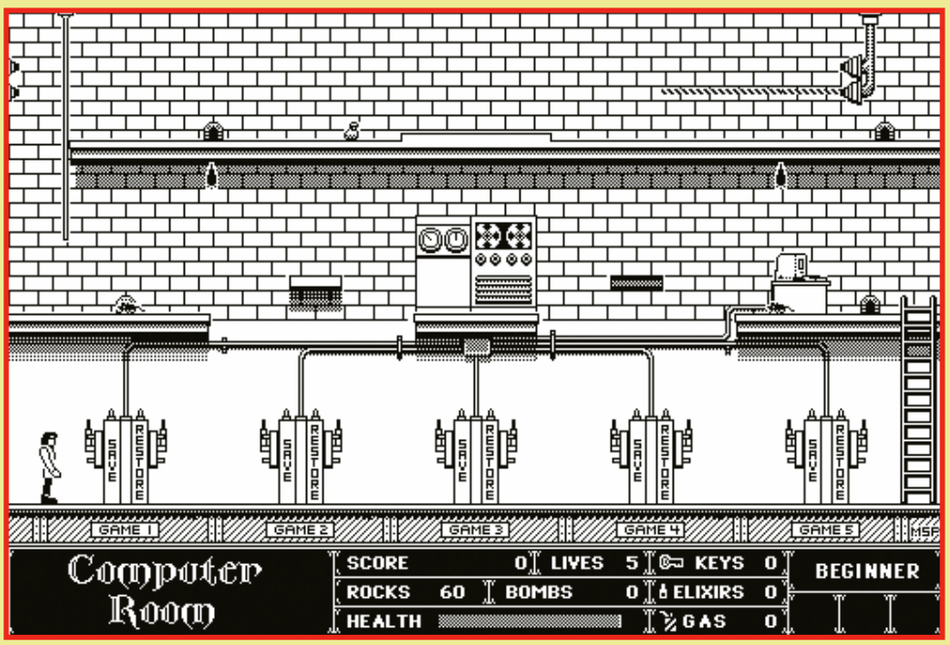
The company hired Dick Noel, a veteran voiceover actor and the original voice of Fred Flintstone, to provide the in-game speech. "The quirky character ideas were all his," acknowledges Eric. "Dick said the animations were so good that it was just like doing a cartoon in Hollywood."

> "THE IDEA THAT MARK AND I COULD MEET JUST ONCE AND DEVELOP A GAME REMOTELY SEEMED KIND OF IMPROBABLE"
> JONATHAN GAY

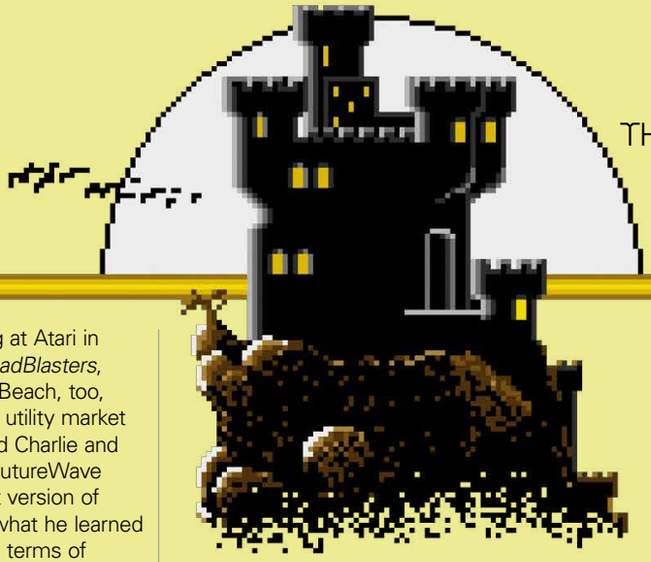
Meanwhile, coder Jonathan was pushing the Mac hardware in other ways. He built a simple sprite and game engine and used hardware video page flipping, or 'double buffering', to create smooth animation, something he says was actually discouraged by Apple and not supported on later colour machines. He also appreciated the consistency the Mac offered, with a set screen and memory size, though he did need the assistance of its older sister. "The 68000 was a good chip to deal with but writing in Assembly language was fussy," remembers Jonathan. "The compiling was on the expensive, slow and separate Apple Lisa. The debugging environment was very primitive… though developing a game in Assembly language had a purity and self-reliance that was enjoyable. I spent my time debugging my own code instead of dealing with the quirks of other people's code."

Marrying together Eric and Jonathan's technical wizardry with Mark's artistic vision and masterful animations, it was no surprise that *Dark Castle* was a great success on release – the only real surprise was that whoever produced the box art had named the previously anonymous hero as 'Prince Duncan', something that still grates with Mark. The team soon began work on a sequel, *Beyond Dark Castle*, which expanded the adventure outside the castle walls. Now you could don a helicopter backpack and fly, *HERO*-style, through forests and over swamps, and bombs were added to your arsenal, handy for blowing up walls as well as enemies.

The game was another hit and the addition of scrolling levels, a health bar, a handy save facility and a much larger quest, showed the series still had lots to offer, yet gamers would have to wait over twenty years for a new iteration to appear. Even before *Beyond Dark Castle* was released



» [Mac] As this computer room suggests, *Beyond Dark Castle* played fast and loose with the medieaval setting.

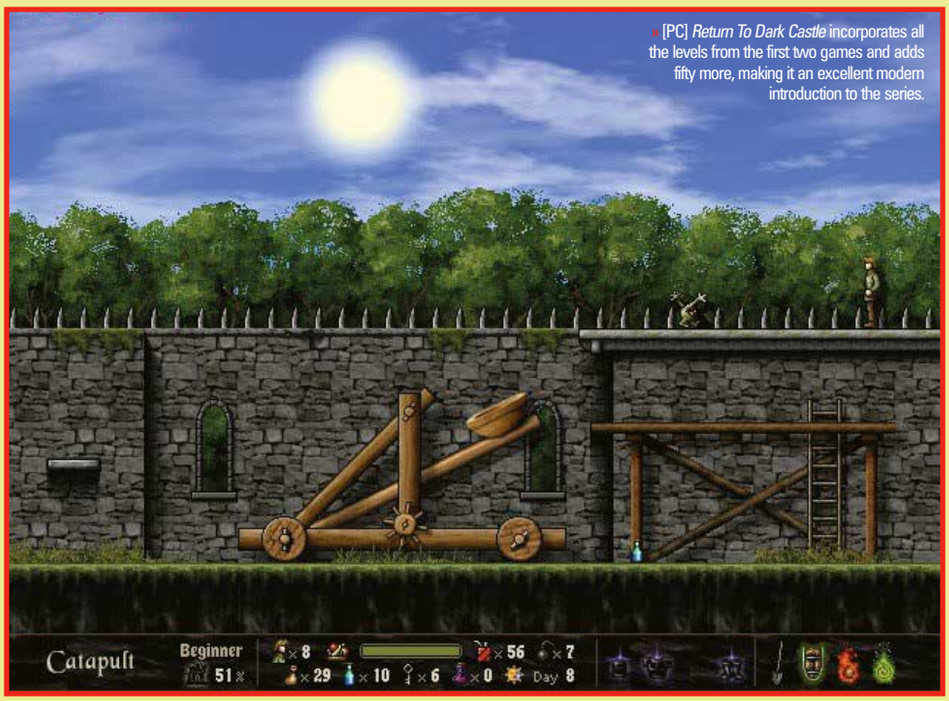


in 1987, Mark had begun working at Atari in its coin-op division, his debut, *RoadBlasters*, appearing the same year. Silicon Beach, too, moved on, focussing on the Mac utility market with products like SuperPaint, and Charlie and Jonathan would go on to found FutureWave Software, the creators of the first version of Flash – indeed Jonathan credits what he learned coding the *Dark Castle* engine, in terms of minimal dependency on the operating system and hardware, as "a formative experience" when creating his ubiquitous media player.

The rights to the franchise were sold and numerous conversions appeared (see Conversion Capers), though with no one from Silicon Beach involved, none matched the original in terms of quality and impact. It would fall to devoted fans to revive the series. Zackary Black and Zack Morris had been working on their own unlicensed homage to the game, which incorporated the 30 levels of the first two games and added fifty of their own creation, since the mid-Nineties. When Mark approached Joe Williams at Delta Tao Software, who then owned the *Dark Castle* IP, in 2004 with a view to buying back the rights, Joe casually mentioned the efforts of the two Zacks. "It was like an incredible work of fan art," gushes Mark. "We helped with the QA and released it as *Return To Dark Castle* through my Super Happy Fun Fun company in 2008 but it's all about their creativity. There's just so much hidden in that game. They'd been working on it for years and were really emotional about it. I'm touched that there are people who were so affected by *Dark Castle*. And a little scared."

Now, four decades after the release of the original game, *Return To Dark Castle* has been re-released on Steam and the Mac App Store, with plans to bring it to the Switch and other platforms. More than that, Mark has been inspired to start work on a brand-new iteration, an epic finale to the series, with the working title *Dark Castle: Revenant* (see the One More Knight panel). And we hope you, dear reader, have been similarly inspired to enter the castle, possibly for the first time, and discover the many pleasures – and pains – that lie across that drawbridge. ✱

Many thanks to Mark and Eric for providing a wealth of behind the scenes material and to Christopher Lyles-Arthur and the community at *Dark Castle* Wiki for their help with screenshots. For more on *Dark Castle*, we recommend Richard Moss' excellent *The Secret History Of Mac Gaming* published by Bitmap Books.



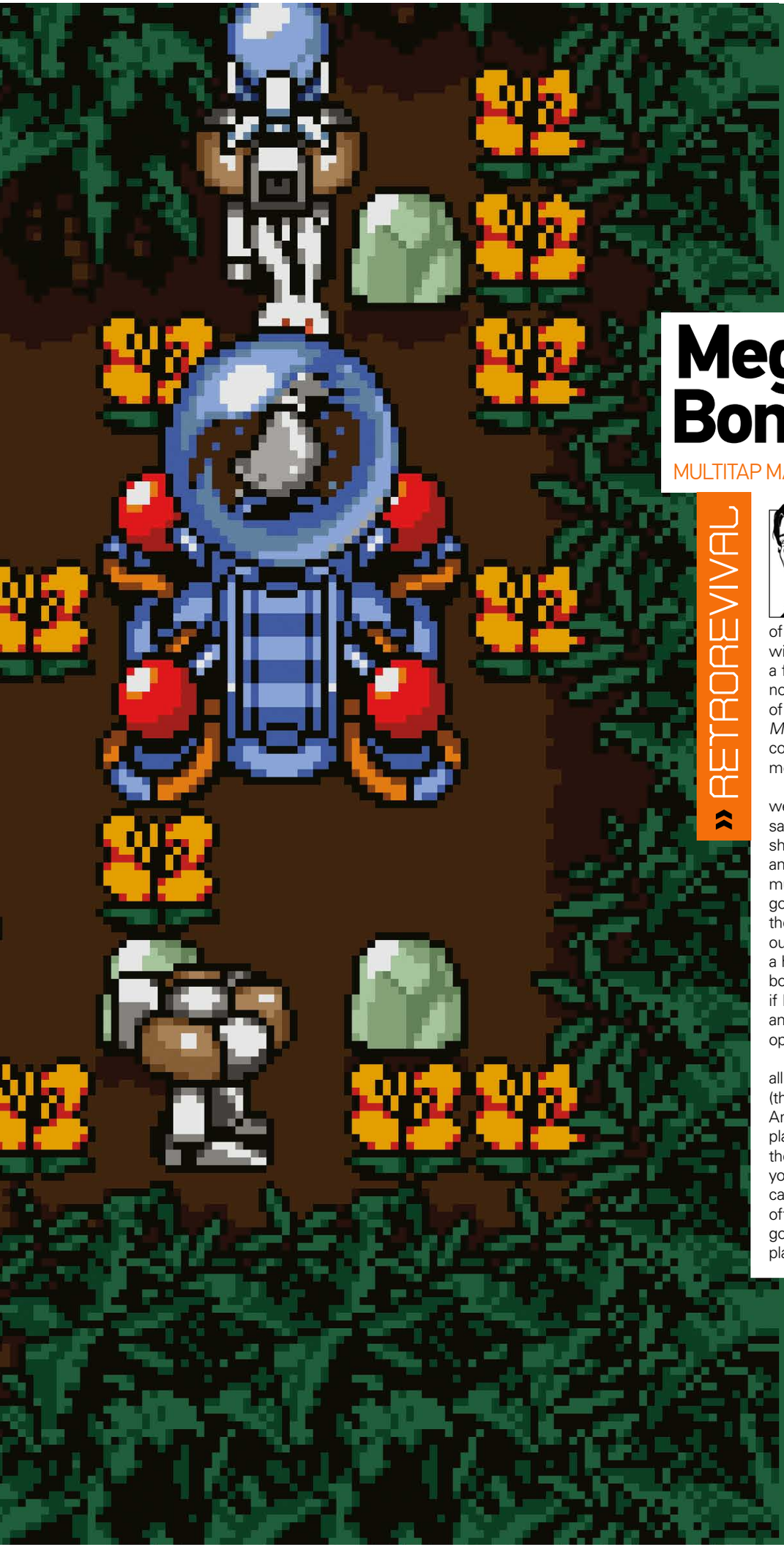
» [PC] *Return To Dark Castle* incorporates all the levels from the first two games and adds fifty more, making it an excellent modern introduction to the series.

ONE MORE KNIGHT

MARK PIERCE ON BRINGING BACK DARK CASTLE

■ "I set up Ludit solely to revive the *Dark Castle* franchise," says Mark. "I'm releasing *Return to Dark Castle* first because it's ready to go, plus when I first put it out in 2008, Apple were basically dead." Stories of Apple's death were of course greatly exaggerated and now Steam allows Mark to bring the game to a far wider audience. More than that, after decades of working in senior management at Atari, being CEO of his own company, Super Happy Fun Fun, and more recently as an executive producer at Visual Concepts on *Lego 2K Drive*, Mark decided he needed a change. "I wanted to get back to my creative roots, so I started drawing and animating again about a year ago. It took me six months to get back to the level I wanted to be at, and now I've started working on *Dark Castle: Revenant*, which is like a magnum opus. I take everything I've learned since making the first game to create this big, glorious finale. Zack Black is part of the team along with Ben Milstead and we're hoping to have it done next year or maybe the one after. I don't want to work in a pressure cooker again. Think of this more as a crockpot."
Visit ludit.games to find out what's cooking.

» Mark working on *Dark Castle: Revenant* – we've seen those graphics moving and they look great, boding well for the series' grand finale.



Mega Bomberman

MULTITAP MADNESS

» MEGA DRIVE » 1994 » WESTONE

I was working in a factory back in 1994, shovelling experimental pharmaceuticals into blister packs. It was incredibly boring and gave me lots of time to try to work out what I wanted to do with my life (though I didn't figure that out until a few years later). Anyway, the point of this is not for me to relive the mind-numbing boredom of that job, but to explain how I afforded *Mega Bomberman*, a Multitap and two extra controllers. Yeah, the job didn't pay enough for me to spring for three controllers.

I was sharing a house with two friends, and we all worked in the same factory, and on the same shifts too. Some of those were night shifts, and we'd get out of work at about 2am and head home. For several months we played multiplayer *Bomberman* every night/morning, goading each other, trying to be the first to get the game-changing power-ups, and not trapping ourselves with badly placed bombs. It was a hoot! *Mega Bomberman* was the reason I bought the Multitap (I can't honestly remember if I had any other games that made use of it) and it was great fun having more than one opponent for a change.

After about six months though we were all made redundant from the factory job (thankfully), and I moved into a flat on my own. And that's where I started playing the single-player content of *Mega Bomberman*. It turns out there's a whole Story mode with bosses, and you can really see how powerful your bombs can be powered up until the flames they give off hit the sides of the screen! It was pretty good fun really, but definitely not on par with playing it with friends. ✱

MAGAZINE CRAFT

PHIL KING

Phil 'Footy' King's career in magazines stretches across five decades and counting. Starting as a staff writer on Crash in the late-Eighties, before becoming editor of Mega Power and popular tips mag PowerStation, he still works on magazines today. We have a kickabout with Phil and get the complete A to Z of his enduring games media career

Words by Stuart Hunt

THEN

Phil kicked off his career writing for *Crash* and *Zzap!64* and was briefly editor of the latter. He later worked on several *Force* titles at Europress Impact, and was editor of *Mega Power*, *PowerStation* and *N•Revolution*.

NOW

These days, Phil is a freelance writer and editor – sub-editing the popular indie film magazine, *Film Stories*. He also writes a regular column for Fusion Retro Book's revived *Zzap!* Amiga mag.

» [Arcade] Phil remembers being wowed by Nichibutsu's *Moon Cresta* when he saw it in his local village pub.

What are some of the first videogames you remember playing, Phil?
It was probably in the arcades during family holidays as a young kid, usually to North Wales or Blackpool – or perhaps by the river at Stourport-on-Severn, where there was a mini-fairground and a little arcade. Some of the coin-ops there were already pretty old, including one called *Frogs!* where you controlled a frog hopping between lily pads and sticking out its tongue to catch flies. There was also *Boot Hill*, a two-player gunfight game, and a basketball game controlled by a trackball. Of course, there were plenty of *Space Invaders* machines too. And probably *Galaxians*. I also recall being impressed by *Moon Cresta* at our village pub, and there was a lovely tabletop version of *Breakout* at another local inn. At some point, we got one of those really basic early consoles at home. It could play tennis (*Pong*), football (*Pong* with four bats) and squash (*Pong* with one bat and a wall to bounce the ball against). It also had a lightgun to fire at square blobs moving around the screen. Basic but fun.

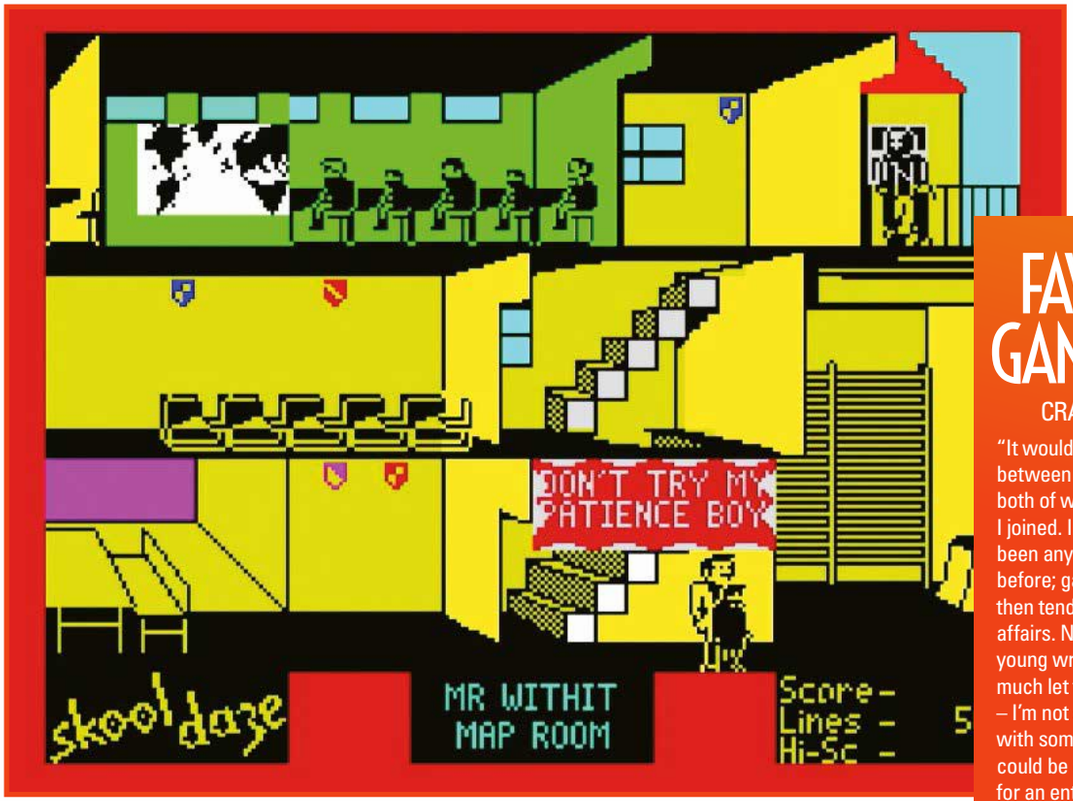
What was the first home computer you ever owned?
It was a Sinclair ZX Spectrum. I pestered my parents to get me one as it would 'help with my school homework'. Unwrapping it on Christmas Day was amazing. I recall playing *Thro' The Wall* quite a lot – we didn't have many other games apart from one of those multi-game packs that weren't that great. Later on, I enjoyed playing all sorts of classic games on it, including *Skool Daze* (my personal favourite), *Atic Atac*, *JetPac*, *Sabre Wulf* (along with most of the other Ultimate games), *Penetrator*, *Ant Attack*, *Manic Miner*, *Jet Set Willy* and Incentive's maze-based *Splat!* (a very underrated game, that one). Not forgetting *Hyper Sports* and *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* and *Supertest* – the Speccy's rubber keyboard got a pounding from those, and I recall having to replace its membrane once or twice.

Did you ever dabble in home coding?
I did do a bit of BASIC programming, too, including an AD&D character generator and a single-screen shoot-'em-up that I managed to speed up with a compiler. One thing I never got around to on the Spectrum was doing my homework on it.

Was writing something you enjoyed at school or doing in your spare time?
I did enjoy writing stories for English homework. I remember the teacher asking me to read one out in class one time, because she thought it was so good (although she only gave me an A minus). It was something about 'the fog', which involved someone being in a coma (or something like that) in hospital and being semiconscious. It was probably a load of old nonsense.

What set you on the path of writing as an actual career?
It all happened by accident, really, as I wasn't sure what I wanted to do after my A-levels (pure maths, applied maths and economics). I did think about going to uni, but I wasn't sure. So I kind of messed about for a year while pondering what to do next. Then *Crash* happened…

You started out as a staff writer on *Crash*, how did that opportunity come about?
I was living with my parents in a village called Clee Hill (where I grew up) about five miles from Ludlow. I was already a *Crash* reader, but I think it was my mum who heard about a staff



» [ZX Spectrum] Phil is a big fan of *Skool Daze*, the classic *Grange Hill*-'em-up released on the ZX Spectrum and C64.

writer job going on the magazine, possibly from [then *Crash* software editor and the face of 'Paul Sumner'] Dom Handy's parents who ran a greengrocer's shop in Ludlow. Being a teacher, she seemed to know everyone in the area. I suppose I must have written in and applied. Somehow I wangled an interview for *Crash*, eventually…

> "One thing I never got around to on the Spectrum was doing my homework on it"
> PHIL KING

Can you remember the first time you visited *Crash* Towers? What do you recall?
It was on King Street and they had this keypad by the door. I must have walked past there many times, so it was exciting to finally see what it was like inside. I thought I was going for an interview for *Crash*, so I was surprised to be asked to play and review a C64 game – *Impossible Mission II* – in the *Zzap!* office. I was more taken aback by that than the surroundings, although I recall Jaz Rignall being there. I think I must have been there quite a while playing and writing, mainly because I was nervous and had never even played on a C64 before. Not surprisingly, I didn't get the job on *Zzap!* at the time, but I was asked to go back a few weeks later to be interviewed for *Crash*. I think it was with Kati Hamza and Dave Western, and we went to the famous De Greys tearooms (now sadly closed) to chat. I must have made a good impression as I got the job.

What are some of your most special memories from working there?
It was a thrill to be there at first and often didn't really feel like work at all – just having fun playing games and writing fun stuff about them. The offices were above the Victoria Wine shop (handy) and there were three floors. After I broke my ankle (while trying out my nephew's new skateboard), I had to clamber up all those stairs on crutches to get to the *Zzap!* office at the top – I'd been moved from *Crash* onto that magazine after the sudden departure of Gordon, Kati and Maff.

Tell us about how those magazines were made, what can you remember?
In the early days, the magazine-making technology was pretty primitive. Taking screenshots involved going into a darkened room and playing a game while the resident photographer used a standard film camera pointed at the screen! We also had to regularly take a floppy disk to the Tortoiseshell Press at the bottom of Corve Street to get the magazine text printed on special paper which the art department would then cut into pieces with a scalpel to lay out on a board, sticking them in place with hot wax and a roller. Old-fashioned paste-up layout. The board would then be scanned somehow by the repro graphics people and turned into four colour (CMYK) film sheets ▶

My FAVOURITE GAMING MAG

CRASH AND ZZAP!64

"It would have to be a toss-up between *Crash* and *Zzap!64* – both of whose heyday was before I joined. I don't think there had been anything quite like them before; games magazines back then tended to be pretty staid affairs. Newsfield gave lots of young writers a chance and pretty much let them do what they liked – I'm not sure how they got away with some of the stuff. The result could be chaotic but often made for an entertaining read. They must have launched the careers of many journalists, some of whom went on to work in the games industry. I am forever grateful for them giving me a chance."

I REMEMBER WHEN

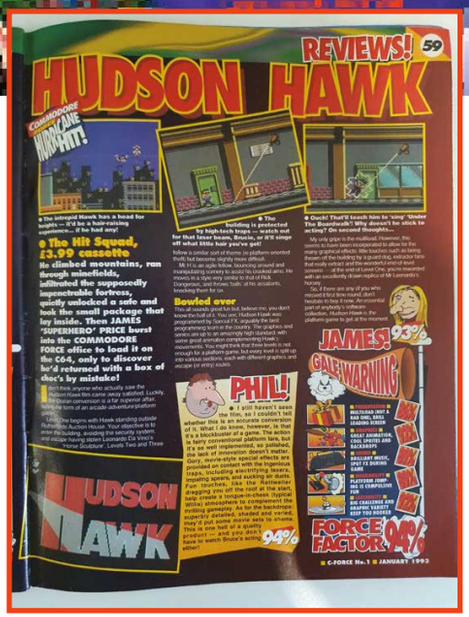
DECK THE HALLS

"Newsfield Christmas parties were usually good fun, but one of them ended up in a big fistfight following the arrival of some gatecrashers, I think. I don't know what caused it or what the heck was going on – I just legged it out of there – but I was later told that somebody ended up hiding in the boot of a car."

I REMEMBER WHEN

FALSE ALARM

"Paragon Christmas parties were also typically drunken, raucous affairs with food fights and the like. One year, somebody ended up setting off a fire alarm at the hotel venue in the early hours of the morning, which disturbed a football team who were due to play AFC Bournemouth the next day."



» Phil was a big fan of Ocean's *Hudson Hawk*, scoring it a whopping 94%! The movie, though, was a bit of a blockbuster bomb.

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» Phil worked on several of the *Force* titles at Europress Impact, including the first issue of *Commodore Force*.

My BEST PRESS TRIP

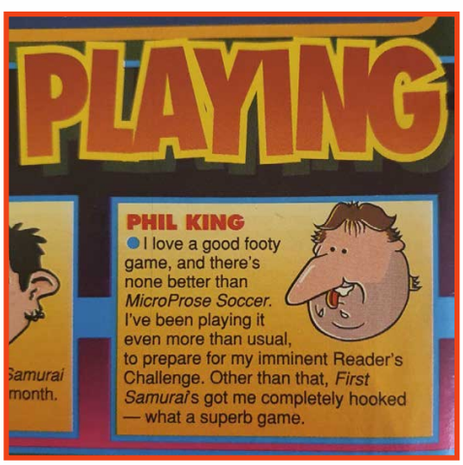
DEMOLITION DERBY LAUNCH EVENT

Amazingly, many PR press trips often involved letting competitive game journalists loose behind the wheel of a car. Phil not only got to play the PlayStation classic *Demolition Derby*, but he also got to experience what it would be like to play real-life dodgems in the game's iconic Bowl arena. Well, sort of. "On the tips magazines, we didn't get to go on so many press trips," Phil shares, "but I do remember Sony's launch event for *Demolition Derby*, which involved racing old banger cars around an oval track. The most memorable moment was when Andy McDermott (now a best-selling author) rolled his car and ended up upside down. I also managed to win the challenge on the game itself and won a magnum of champagne."

▶ to send to the printers. We eventually shifted to DTP, working on Macs for editorial and layout.

> "I once had a stack of Crash T-shirts in the wardrobe, which would probably be worth something now, but I think they ended up being sent to a charity shop" PHIL KING

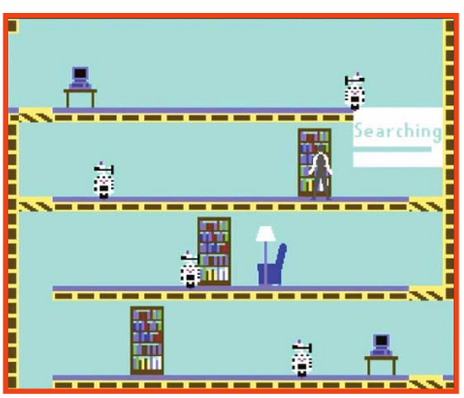
What are some of your favourite videogames and game genres? Is there a type of game that you particularly liked to review?
It's no secret that I was a big fan of football games, hence the nickname 'Footy Phil'. From *Match Day* and *MicroProse Soccer* to *Kick Off* and *Sensible Soccer* and later, *FIFA* and *Pro Evolution Soccer*, I was forever kicking a virtual ball around – I wasn't much good at the real thing. I enjoyed most game genres, though. Favourite games include *Skool Daze* and *Laser Squad* on the Spectrum, *Turrican* on the C64, *Lemmings* and *Pinball Fantasies* on the Amiga, *NBA Jam* on the Mega Drive, *Super Tennis* on the SNES, and *GoldenEye* on the N64.


PLAYING
PHIL KING
I love a good footy game, and there's none better than MicroProse Soccer. I've been playing it even more than usual, to prepare for my imminent Reader's Challenge. Other than that, First Samurai's got me completely hooked — what a superb game.
Samurai month.

» Phil gained the nickname Phil 'Footy' King on account of his love of footy games. One of his all-time faves is *MicroProse Soccer*.

You quickly rose the ranks to assistant, section and editor roles on *Crash* and then *Zzap!64* – what was that experience, and added responsibility, like?
Actually, I was only ever a staff writer on *Crash* and spent just over a year working on the magazine. I soon became a sub-editor on *Zzap!* and had a short stint as the editor – I wasn't really ready at the time, so it was a relief when someone else took over. I was never the ambitious type; I just enjoyed working on magazines, writing about things of interest, and trying to shoehorn in a few jokes and pop culture references.

Tell us about your favourite Newsfield magazine cover.
Famously, Oli Frey used to paint all the artwork for the *Crash* and *Zzap!* covers. Fusion Retro Books even did a special hardback book of his artwork a few years back – it's something of a



» [C64] *Impossible Mission II* was the game Phil was asked to review when he interviewed for a staffer job at Newsfield.

> "Sourcing demos for the Mega-CD covermount wasn't too difficult. The hard part was then getting the discs approved by Sega"
> PHIL KING

collector's item now. I once had a stack of *Crash* T-shirts in the wardrobe, which would probably be worth something now, but I think they ended up being sent to a charity shop. I like the space-based covers best; I think my favourite is probably the one for *Zzap!* issue 25 with the magazine logo as a spaceship fending off other smaller ships in the letter shapes of 'CU' and 'CVG'. I've always appreciated cheeky humour like that.

What can you remember about the office move and Newsfield's closure?
Somehow it was never quite the same vibe after moving offices to the Case Mill (aka Stalag *Zzap!*) down by the river, on the edge of town, but it was still a lot of fun working with Stuart Wynne and Robin Hogg. I recall we each bought an Atari Lynx and used to enjoy lunchtime multiplayer games of *Slime World* and *War Birds*. Sadly, it all came to a sudden end one day when a bloke who looked amazingly like George Lucas walked into the office and told everyone the firm had gone into administration. It was a total shock to most of the staff, including me.

You then worked on several of the *Force* titles for Europress Impact. Tell us about that experience and how it differed to the Newsfield days, if at all.
Well, that was a surprise, being asked back to work at the Case Mill, only perhaps a couple of months after Newsfield had been shut down. I was really pleased to go back and work with most of my old friends, although Robin Hogg opted not to do so. It wasn't really that different from the Newsfield days. Working on *Amiga Force* was fun, especially the regular lunchtime sessions of *Sensible Soccer* – the magazine team even took part in the inaugural *Sensible Soccer World Cup*, which I somehow ended up winning! I beat Germany (Jason Dutton) in the final with Denmark. I still have the trophy somewhere.

You were the longest-serving editor of *Mega Power*, taking over from Dave 'The Games Animal' Perry? Tell us about your time on that magazine.
I'd just moved down to Bournemouth to join Paragon Publishing in 1993; it was the first time I'd left home, so it was all very exciting. Dave was great to work with and we had a good camaraderie on the magazine. I remember we had a CD player in the office, shared with

My PROUDEST MOMENT

MAPPING TOMB RAIDER

"Back in the games magazine days, I'd say mapping the whole of the original *Tomb Raider* for *PowerStation* was a major moment. I sat there playing it and drawing maps by hand with pencil and paper. I think we then redrew them in PhotoShop and I colour-coded the platforms by height. Anyhow, it took a lot of doing and resulted in our best-ever sales figures for the magazine. More recently, it's probably writing a book: *Chromebooks In Easy Steps*. Sure, it's just a standard guide book, but I wrote it all myself and even did the basic page layout (before it was tweaked), so it felt like an achievement."

I REMEMBER WHEN

SUSPICIOUS LUNCHBOX

"At Paragon, Bournemouth was often the venue for political party conferences, which led to a major security operation in the town. One of our designers was seen 'acting suspiciously', wandering around with a lunchbox in Dingles department store. Some police followed him back to the office and watched him open it, standing back as he did so, just in case it might explode or something!"

My FUTURE CLASSIC

ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW HORIZONS

I have to admit I don't play an awful lot of modern games nowadays, apart from on my teenage son's Nintendo Switch. I suppose *Animal Crossing* is already considered a classic by some, but I've enjoyed playing that. I do like an open-ended game where you can just mess about and be creative.

I REMEMBER WHEN

TEAM BONDING

"Advertising team folks were always a breed apart, but towards the end of the Newsfield era, the ad department was being run by a rather vivacious Brummie woman (I can't recall her name). She seemed to be keen on strange team-bonding exercises, one of which involved her staff crawling around on all fours, giving each other piggybacks in the office. That's a sight I won't forget."

Sega Pro, and we would take it in turns to choose the music. I used to play a lot of alternative-indie stuff – I'm not sure everyone appreciated it, but some people seemed to like it. The Paragon pub at that time was The Jug Of Ale, just around the corner, so we would often congregate there – Stella for £2 a pint, those were the days. Naturally, we used to visit Sega HQ on the Cromwell Road in London on a regular basis, although we had to lug a great big heavy Mac setup there to take screenshots. Sometimes there was no room in their car park and I remember once transporting the Mac there in a shopping trolley from the DIY superstore down the road.

> "Once I'd moved onto PowerStation, the PlayStation tips magazine, there was less scope for imaginative prose" PHIL KING

We believe *Mega Power* was the first UK console magazine to feature a CD covermount – how easy was it to work with game publishers to secure demos for these demo discs?

Sourcing demos for the Mega-CD covermount wasn't too difficult. I think most publishers were keen to showcase their games. The hard part was then getting the discs approved by Sega, which could take some time, and I recall it being a bit of a hassle – I was always on the phone to them, trying to sort it out before the magazine deadline. It was very tight sometimes.

Were there any writers you've really enjoyed working with and reading their stuff?

I've enjoyed working with a lot of the writers on various magazines. In particular, I enjoyed working with Stuart and Robin on *Zzap!64*. Reviews were usually the most fun to read, especially the really scathing ones. Once I'd moved onto *PowerStation*, the PlayStation tips magazine, there was less scope for imaginative prose, but we still had a lot of fun and I enjoyed working with Ryan Butt and Paul Morgan in the early days. I ended up editing *PowerStation* for about ten years, so I must have liked it.

Did any of your reviews ever land you in hot water?

I think one or two publishers could get a bit miffed if we gave their game a low score. On occasion, *Zzap!* would even print letters from PR people allowing them to defend their game. I also recall someone writing into *CTW* (the trade magazine) to complain about us giving a game a score that was too high and implying that we were biased towards the software company.

How did you come to join Imagine Publishing? Tell us about some of the titles

» Phil's brief stint as editor of *Zzap!64* began in issue 81. It featured an exclusive on Thalamus' *Creatures*.

» Phil was a long-standing editor of *Mega Power* – the first UK console mag to feature a CD covermount.

» *Phil edited N•Revolution while working at Imagine Publishing.*

you worked on there.
Technically, I was an employee for a few weeks after the Paragon takeover, but I was then made redundant as *PowerStation* was merged with Imagine's own PlayStation tips title – run by my old mucker, Ryan Butt. I did end up doing freelance work for that and other Imagine magazines, including a stint as the editor of *N•Revolution*, a Nintendo mag which they were trying to rebrand to appeal to younger readers – sadly, the plan didn't really work out and so they eventually closed it.

> "I launched quite a lot of titles, including the Official Raspberry Pi Beginner's Guide"
> PHIL KING

What are some of your best memories from working there?
I enjoyed working with Tom Leclerc on *N•Revolution* (I think it was just us two on the editorial team) and the office had a good vibe, with quite a lot of familiar faces from the Paragon days – just like old times in a lot of ways.

Were you also not the editor of *Raspberry Pi* magazine for a time?
I wasn't the editor of the magazine (although I've sub-edited and written a whole load of articles for it), but I was the full-time books editor for Raspberry Pi for just over three years. In that time, I launched quite a lot of titles, including the *Official Raspberry Pi Beginner's Guide*, as well as contributing to their magazines. I did a *Code Club* book and came up with the idea of including extra text tips which could only be deciphered by viewing them through special colour cardboard glasses that you popped out of a page of the book.

Tell us more about those books.
My favourite book from that time was probably *Code The Classics*, in which we covered creating 'tributes' to classic retro games (*Pong*, *Bubble Bobble*, *Frogger*, *Centipede* and *Sensible Soccer*), with Python coding. Eben Upton himself did the main programming for those games and we had industry veterans Dan Malone (*Speedball 2*, *The Chaos Engine*) on graphics and Allister Brimble (*Alien Breed*, *Rollercoaster Tycoon*) on sound. So it was fun to work on *Code The Classics: Volume II* recently. We also did a *Retro Gaming With Raspberry Pi* bookazine (now in its third edition). It's one of the most popular use cases for a Raspberry Pi computer. With something like the Picade kit from Pimoroni, you can easily build a mini arcade machine and emulate all sorts of systems on it. Or put a Raspberry Pi inside a case resembling a classic console such as a PlayStation or Game Boy.

So, what are you up to now? We understand you're now a freelance writer and editor.
Apart from that full-time stint at Raspberry Pi, I've been a freelancer since leaving Paragon/Imagine in 2006. I spent about the first year on *Pure* magazine, for PlayStation (originally PSP only), working with Dave Perry again. That was fun. I've written for numerous magazines and websites, on a wide range of topics, although gaming and technology are my main areas. I've covered smartphones, tablets, apps, videogames, computers, gadgets, audio equipment, TVs, cameras, music, films and books.

Tell us about some of the other publications you've worked on.
I've also sub-edited a huge range of magazines and bookazines over the years. That includes a few issues of **Retro Gamer** a while back – although I'm still yet to write for you guys… one day! I've been working for the *Raspberry Pi Official Magazine*, formerly known as *The MagPi*, for around 11 years. In that time, I've built all sorts of projects with Raspberry Pi computers, involving things like robotics, home automation, time-lapse photography, media playback/streaming, bird call identification, weather stations, AI and, of course, retro gaming. Among other work right now, I sub-edit *Film Stories*, a brilliant independent movie magazine. I'm also writing a regular A-Z column for Fusion Retro's revived *Zzap!* Amiga mag, so things have sort of come full circle. *

My BEST INTERVIEW

PR WHISTLE-BLOWER

Unfortunately, Phil didn't get the opportunity to conduct many interviews during his time as a games journalist in the heyday of videogame print media; however, he does share with us one insightful anecdote – one that might possibly explain the reason why. "I didn't do many interviews back in the day, although I did obviously meet lots of programmers and other games industry folks," remembers Phil. "I recall chatting to a certain PR person about rival magazines reviewing unfinished games and then, rather unwisely, printing some of his comments verbatim, which got him into hot water. He wasn't very happy!"

I REMEMBER WHEN

AN EERIE CASE

"There were rumours about the old Case Mill being haunted and secret tunnels leading back to Ludlow Castle. Probably a load of old cobblers, but my colleague Lucy Hickman told us that while working late at the office, she was so spooked by something, she ended up hiding in the broom cupboard all night."

RoboCop

NOT MANY VIDEOGAME TUNES CAN CLAIM TO HAVE BEEN USED TO SELL WASHING MACHINES. NOT MANY CAN CLAIM TO HAVE BEEN SAMPLED BY AN AMERICAN RAPPER. BUT JONATHAN DUNN'S TITLE TUNE FOR OCEAN SOFTWARE'S ROBOCOP ACHIEVED BOTH AND SO MUCH MORE

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

IN THE KNOW

- **» DEVELOPER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
- **» COMPOSER:** JONATHAN DUNN
- **» BEST TRACK:** TITLE TUNE
- **» RELEASE:** 1990
- **» PLATFORM:** C64, VARIOUS
- **» GENRE:** ACTION

***RoboCop* began life in 1987 as an ultraviolet yet whip-smart sci-fi fable.** It also offered the perfect premise for a platform shooter. When the game arrived in arcades and later made the jump to home systems, it shot to the top of the charts. Yet while it did a decent job of capturing the film's atmosphere, it's fondly remembered today for something else entirely: the awesome soundtrack composed by Jonathan Dunn.

Jonathan had joined Ocean Software the same year that *RoboCop* was released and he worked on the 8-bit versions of the game. He was acutely aware that the tunes needed to be original. "We generally never had the rights to use anything from the movie soundtrack in the game version, but we always had the script to design the game content with," he says.

> "WE GENERALLY NEVER HAD THE RIGHTS TO USE ANYTHING FROM THE MOVIE SOUNDTRACK IN THE GAME VERSION, BUT WE ALWAYS HAD THE SCRIPT TO DESIGN THE GAME CONTENT WITH"
> JONATHAN DUNN

» *RoboCop* on the Game Boy was a difficult game to complete but it at least started with that blistering title tune.

» [C64] A glitch turned level four of the C64 version into a mess so Ocean imposed a strict time limit for level three so most players wouldn't see it.

This gave Jonathan, who was Ocean's senior sound designer, a great deal of freedom, although, for one of the tunes, he did actually use a sample of the original *RoboCop* theme by Basil Poledouris. "I can't remember why we were allowed to use it. Maybe we weren't," he says.

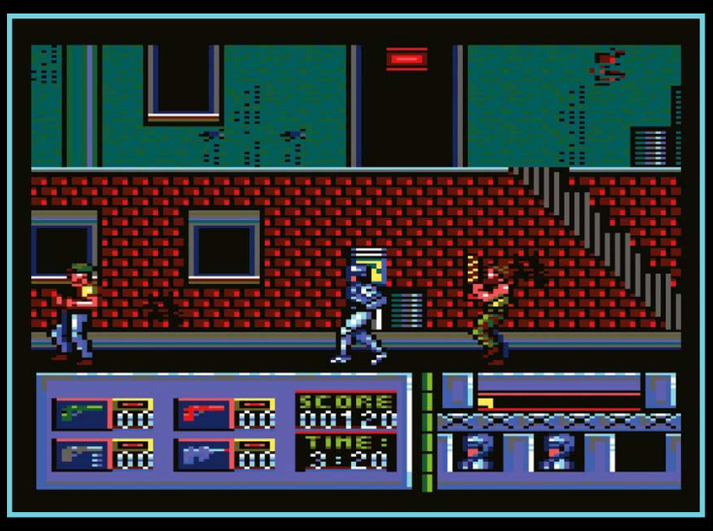
In general, for *RoboCop*'s stages, he aimed to match the style and tempo of his tunes to what was happening on the screen. For the title theme, however, he decided to do something entirely different that wasn't necessarily tied to the game. The result was a quality piece of music that resonated beyond the game, finding appreciation in the wider music and creative industries.

Jonathan, who lived above his mother's restaurant in Preston at the time, vividly recalls the moment the steady, march-like rhythm began to take shape. "I came up with the main chord riff while playing around on the piano in the family restaurant one evening when everyone had gone home," he says. But this wasn't typical of his way of working. "Most times I'd get the idea for a piece while playing the synth in my office, often playing along to a backing track played on the computer," he explains.

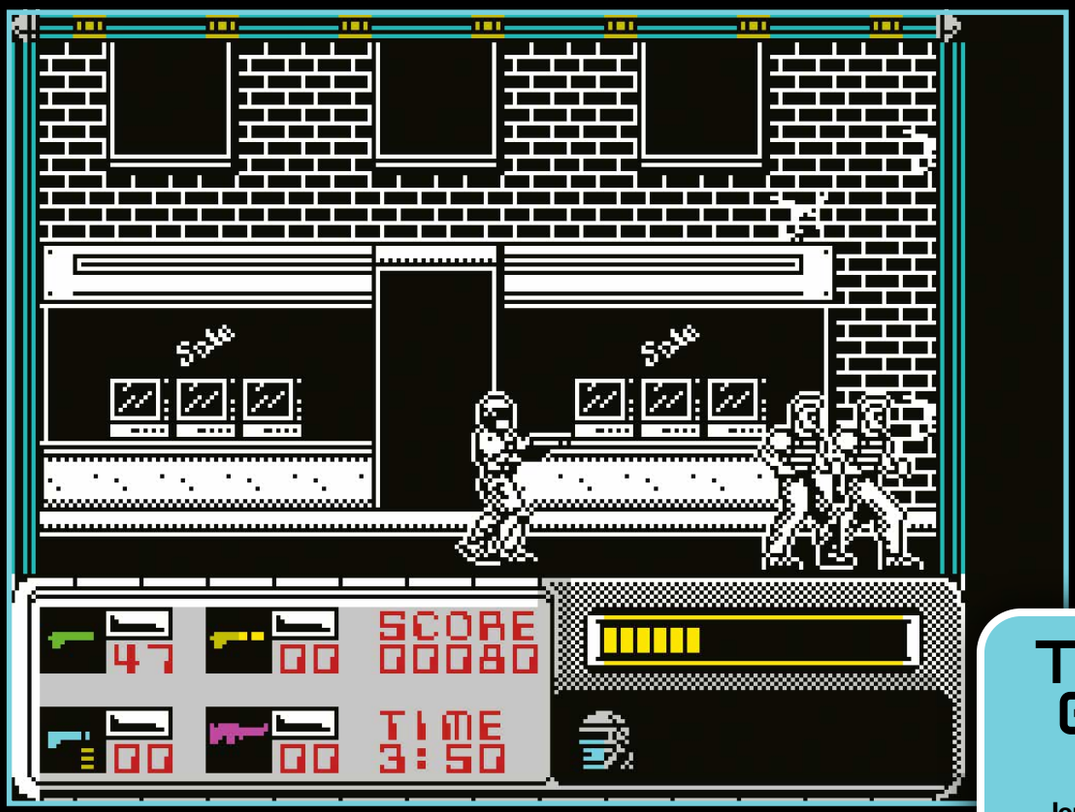
The Commodore 64 version of the soundtrack came first. It was the machine on which Dunn had cut his teeth as both a programmer and a chiptune musician so he was intimately familiar with its inner workings. Indeed, before getting his break as a professional composer, he had written music for the C64 under the pseudonym Chroid while also studying performance music and technology at college.

One of his works came second in a competition in *Zzap!64* and this led to wider recognition of his talent, as well as his first published commercial music which featured in *Subterranea*, programmed by Hugh Binns and released by Hewson. Jonathan quickly grew to trust his instincts and so, from the moment he nailed the chord riff for the *RoboCop* theme on his mother's piano, he knew, deep down, that he had the right tune

■ Jonathan Dunn has been making videogame music since the Eighties, working on music for games like *Jurassic Park* and *The Untouchables*. He's currently the COO of the Slovenian game publisher Triternion.



» [Amstrad CPC] Jonathan Dunn wrote the music for all of Ocean's 8-bit versions of the game.



» [ZX Spectrum] The 128K Spectrum and CPC versions of the game also included in-game speech.

» [Game Boy] While Jonathan composed some pleasant tunes for each section of the game they tended to be drowned out by gunfire.

for the game. "The truth is, the arrogance of youth meant that I had the confidence to just make the music that I thought was right for the game and it turns out that this was the correct thing to do this time," he says, brushing away the suggestion that the haunting and melancholic sound of the title theme was entirely intentional.

The C64 version of the *RoboCop* soundtrack was followed by the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions. "The Game Boy version came later and it was pretty challenging at the time as I hadn't worked on that machine before," Dunn says of the version that now receives so much attention. As it turns out, there was a bit of preparation work to do. "Before we could do anything, we needed a sound driver, which John Brandwood did as I wasn't a Z80 programmer," Jonathan adds. Yet he was enthused. "Working on a new machine was always fun. It always started with, 'Right, what can this thing do?'"

The more familiar Jonathan became with the Game Boy, the more impressed he was. "It had some interesting sound capabilities that made it much different to the other formats. A user defined waveform and stereo capabilities which moved it beyond the Spectrum and Amstrad simple square wave options," he says.

It helped enormously that he had become vastly accomplished at getting the most out of the sound chips of other 8-bit machines. This meant Jonathan was able to really push the Game Boy to its limits. In fact, it was on this version that his *RoboCop* title tune really took on a life of its own although he can't remember exactly how long it took him to achieve. "In those days everything was done much quicker," he admits. "I wouldn't be surprised if it was only two weeks worth of work."

» [C64] Ocean's *RoboCop* (and the original version of the iconic title tune) was first developed on the Commodore 64.

The result is a tune that, once heard, is difficult to forget and many listeners have tried to understand why it resonates so strongly. "I watched a YouTube video by a person called Zane Carney, talking about the music theory of *RoboCop* Game Boy and in it he describes the way in which I used the chord progression as an emotive tool that gives it this overall melancholic atmosphere."

Jonathan, however, remains pragmatic. "The truth is, I just sat at the piano and came up with something that I really enjoyed playing." ✱

THE SONG GOES ON AND ON

Jonathan Dunn discusses that infamous Ariston advert

■ Even if you've never heard Jonathan Dunn's original *RoboCop* game title theme, you'll still likely know the tune. The Game Boy version was used in a television advert by Ariston to promote its appliances. It included the repeated words "And On", ending with "And Ariston".

An advertising executive approached Ocean, apparently struck by the repetitive nature of the tune. "I think I'd had some prior warning that it was going to happen, though I don't think anyone thought it would have the impact it did. It ran on TV at the time for about a year," Jonathan says.

Since then, there have been many covers including one by indie game designer Chef Boyardee. It's been used in the song *In Down Bad* by rapper Lil B. There have been mixes on YouTube and the tune was chosen by screenwriter and presenter Charlie Brooker on BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*. "It's wonderful that the tune has meant so much to a lot of people, and that some of them love it enough to make their own versions," Jonathan says.

KAIKO

It takes only one really exceptional game for a studio to become a cult developer. In Kaiko's case, that was the amazing insect-themed shmup Apidya. With a remaster due shortly, Apidya helped the short-lived German company become a firm favourite with the Amiga audience

WORDS BY THOMAS NICKEL

In the Eighties and Nineties, action games from Japanese studios like Konami, Capcom or Taito were in a class of their own. This was particularly noticeable in Western arcades and Japanese game centers, where these companies and their creative output inspired young developers all over the world. This included a group of young men in Germany who went and started a games company that didn't last too long, but produced some genuine classics that Amiga fans still talk about today.

These three young men were composer Chris Hülsbeck, programmer Peter Thierolf and artist Frank Matzke, and the name of said company was Kaiko. But while Kaiko was founded in 1990, its roots reach further back, as Peter Thierolf remembers. "I started developing games as a freelancer in the late-Eighties, initially for the C64, and distributed them through publishers. Together with Chris Hülsbeck, who was a friend of mine even before his career at Rainbow Arts, I developed the TFMX Sound Editor and we secured a publishing deal with Demonware."

Shortly after that, Frank Matzke, the third founding member of Kaiko entered the picture. While working on a project called *Beyond The Planets*, Peter Thierolf was introduced to the artist by a common friend and they hit it off right away. The TFMX Sound Editor and Chris' CD releases give Kaiko its roots in the world of audio – Chris and Peter founded a company called AUDIOS, which stands for Art Under Design, Imaginations Of Sound, and released among other things Chris' first album *Shades*.

> "The name Kaiko was actually only intended as a label for game releases"
> **Peter Thierolf**

Indeed, the label Kaiko was created only later for game development and was a part of AUDIOS. "To bring Chris back from Düsseldorf and professionalise everything, we registered a business and worked together," continues Peter. "The name Kaiko was actually only intended as a label for game releases. Chris also released CDs, and then the TFMX tool. The name became really serious when we launched *Gem'X* via Demonware." As a fan of a Japanese studio of a similar name, Frank Matzke came up with the name Kaiko – a play on their big inspiration Taito.

As stated before, Japanese games had a big impact on the Kaiko crew, as Peter explains. "We definitely all found the arcade games of the time the most interesting; those were the things we admired, not just because of their style – it was our goal to make such experiences like that playable on the Amiga. That applies not only to their presentation, but also to their game design." Taito and others were not Kaiko's only inspiration though, another trend, that just got started in the early Nineties, also had a big impact on the young company. Frank Matzke was all over imported Japanese games magazines – he loved the back then

GAMES TO DISCOVER

GEM'X
AMIGA/C64/ATARI ST, 1991

■ Kaiko's first release is a colourful puzzler that feels heavily inspired by the aesthetics of Japanese arcade games.

THE ADVENTURES OF QUIK & SILVA
AMIGA, 1991

■ This simple action platformer was produced via Kaiko's budget label and published on a magazine disk.

APIDYA
AMIGA, 1992

■ This tough horizontal shooter combines *Gradius* mechanics with a unique insect setting and great pixel art.

METAL LAW
AMIGA, 1992

■ The second release by New Bits On The Ram is rather simple, but brings to mind Sega's arcade hit *E-SWAT*.

SOFTWARE MANAGER
AMIGA, MS-DOS PC, 1994

■ This funny simulator about games development marks a huge departure from Kaiko's previous work and also came to PC.

new and unusual manga style, which was very unique and seemed extremely cool for young European developers and players alike. This can be clearly seen in *Gem'X*, Kaiko's first game.

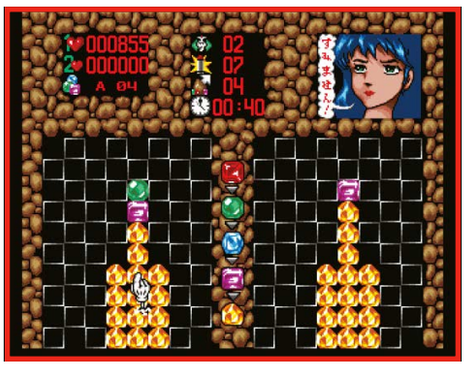
Released in 1991 on the Amiga, Atari ST and Commodore 64, *Gem'X* takes inspiration from contemporary arcade puzzlers. Stage progression is handled in a branch-like structure similar to Taito's *Darius*, furthermore the game features a girl named Kiki, drawn by Frank in the style of early Nineties anime and wearing a bunny suit. The title screen not only says the title *Gem'X*, but also tries to spell out the words 'Hi' and 'Pyramic Magic' in Hiragana which admittedly didn't quite work out. Looking at the in-game credits, names like P Tiefune and F Matzico can be found – pseudonyms for Peter Thierolf and Frank Matzke.

Between levels, Kiki and her pixelated friends pose in various states of undress, which brings more adult arcade titles like Kaneko's *Gals Panic* to mind. Indeed, the whole game is presented like an Amiga port of a Japanese game. The blurb on the cover says "Official Home Version", the first uppermost text on the back of the box is once again in Japanese – a bold but highly effective method of attracting attention in 1991!

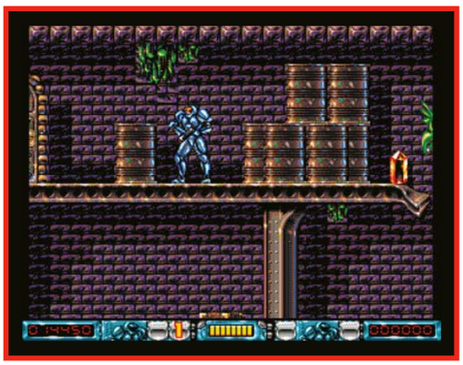
For *Apidya*, Kaiko's next and probably most famous game, the team partnered with publisher Blue Byte and released the thematically very unique shmup exclusively on the Amiga in 1992. The long, anime-style introduction brings to mind the impressive cutscenes of games on NEC's PC Engine CD-ROM², while the game itself borrows heavily on the upgrade bar mechanic found in Konami's *Gradius*. Meanwhile, the game's insect theme seems inspired by Taito's *Insector X* from 1989. With an amazing soundtrack, fantastic art and excellent playability, *Apidya* quickly became a cult hit among the Amiga fanbase.

Sadly, the game didn't do as well financially as it deserved as Peter Thierolf explains.

» [Amiga] Where other shmups at the time went into space, *Apidya* goes for an insect theme, similar to the Taito-published *Insector X*.



» [Amiga] *Gem'X*, Kaiko's first release, is all about colourful gems and anime girls in various states of undress.



» [Amiga] According to the intro, budget title *Metal Law* takes place in a crime-ridden New York.

» [Amiga] *The Adventures Of Quik & Silva* is another budget game with some very unlicensed quasi-cameos.

APIDYA RETURNS

THE CULT SHOOTER IS GETTING A BRAND-NEW UPDATE

Apidya, arguably Kaiko's best game, is finally coming to modern systems. "Many years ago, a software developer, Stefan Becker, contacted us," Peter tells us. "He had single-handedly created a multi-platform port of *Apidya*. At the time, it wasn't finished, but it ran on iOS devices, PC and Mac and looked pretty cool. He had developed cool tools to extract enemy movements from gameplay videos and wanted to develop it further and perhaps release it for iOS. We thought it was a good idea and were willing to make it happen. I set about collecting the necessary rights and it slowly progressed as a hobby project." Before long a commercial release beckoned. "At some point, we sat down together to discuss it seriously and realised that it would be nice if it could be adapted to current tech like 16:9 displays," continues Peter, "so we got more involved and provided graphics originally created for a never-released 32-bit version of *Apidya*." *Apidya' Special*, the new version of the original game, programmed by Stefan Becker and published by ININ is due for release later this year.

SUPER GEM'Z

AMIGA, UNRELEASED

■ With the game leaking before release, this *Gem'X* sequel was never published, but can be found online.

RECORD OF THE ELF SAGA

PLAYSTATION, UNRELEASED

■ This graphically stunning 2D game for the PlayStation was shown in magazines, but was ultimately cancelled.

» [Amiga] Is this Bub from Taito's *Bubble Bobble*? One wonders why *Quik & Silva* had no legal repercussions.

» [Amiga] For the unreleased *Super Gem'Z*, Kaiko came up with a new gem-pushing mechanic and fun multiplayer options.

"The development took a long time. On the one hand, the tools and methods weren't quite as world class as they should have been, and on the other hand, it's a big game. It's not just five long stages, but a bunch of bosses, a couple of bonus levels and an elaborate introduction sequence. A few friends helped out, with some of the bosses, I remember that someone outside the company did the boss for stage 3. Around the time of the release, we did some press visits, and it was great to see the enthusiasm of the editors. On the other hand, we had won Blue Byte as a publisher and expected them to release the game under the actual Blue Byte label, which they didn't do; they used their little-known Play Byte logo. The response from magazines was very positive, even in the UK. That was all great, of course, but we didn't earn much. We got an advance payment on royalties and that was it. The game failed on the market. It was definitely a bitter experience. I think in terms of perception by critics and fans, it was our most successful project, but economically it was a disaster and certainly a nail in the studio's coffin."

> "We had a booth at the Amiga trade fair in Cologne, and the disk was stolen from the drive!"
> **Peter Thierolf**

Kaiko took another bad hit only a little bit later. *Super Gem'Z*, the sequel to *Gem'X* was supposed to come out in 1992 as well. With better graphics and all-new gameplay, this game looked very promising – but then things went horribly wrong. "We had finished developing *Super Gem'Z*, and Software 2000 was our publishing partner," Peter explains. "We had a booth at the Amiga trade fair in Cologne, where the game was running on an actual Amiga and the disk was stolen from the drive!"

Of course, this version quickly spread through the substantial software piracy scene and that was the end of an official *Super Gem'Z* release. "After that trade fair, Software 2000 decided not to publish the game after all," continues Peter. "Also, Software 2000 then joined the company, otherwise we could theoretically have looked for another publisher. I was already no longer with Kaiko at that point, but it was very sad, of course. We had a lot of fun with the game, especially with the multiplayer mode."

Apart from the big productions, Kaiko also dabbled in smaller games: under the label New Bits On The Ram, the company produced two smaller games that were distributed on the coverdiscs of magazines like Germany's *Amiga Fun*. Two games were released that way. In 1991, there was *The Adventures Of Quik & Silva*, a simple, but charming action platformer with great music and a selection of enemies that would give copyright lawyers sleepless nights. Heroes Quik and Silva shoot at enemies that look quite a lot like the cute protagonist of Nebulus or Bub from *Bubble Bobble*, there's robotic Mario-looking heads on springs and there's even an enemy that looks an awful lot like Sega's Sonic – the latter appeared on Amiga screens even before the launch of Sonic's first adventure on the Mega Drive!

In the early Nineties, Kaiko's lack of business experience could really be felt, as Peter explains.

THE DNA OF KAIKO

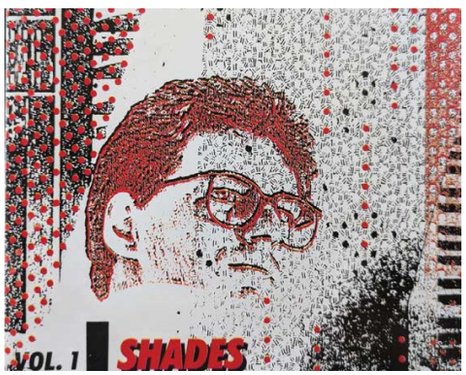
WHAT GOES INTO THE GAMES

INSPIRED BY TAITO

■ Kaiko drew a lot of inspiration from Japanese developers. Taito especially left a huge impression on the team, so much, that the name Kaiko – pronounced Ka-Iko, according to Peter Thierolf – is a direct reference to the creators of *Space Invaders*, *Bubble Bobble* and *Darius*.

STARTING WITH DEMONWARE

■ Kaiko's first game *Gem'X* was published by Boris Kunkel's and Will Weber's company Demonware – a developer and publisher that also focussed on the Amiga and arcade-style games. Read all about that company and its rather fascinating history in **Retro Gamer** issue 274.



MUSICAL ROOTS

■ As a label of AUDIOS and with composer Chris Hülsback as a founding member, Kaiko not only put a big focus on its games' music, it also released soundtracks, the first of which was Chris Hülsbeck's album *Shades*, which contained music from *Turrican*, *R-Type* and others.

» [Amiga] The *Gem'X* sequel *Super Gem'Z* shows the progress artist Frank Matzke made with his anime-style art.

» [Amiga] For *Software Manager*, Kaiko went into a classic German genre, the slightly humorous business-simulator.

"Kaiko had financial difficulties right from the start. Frank and I hardly earned anything until the final phase; all the money went to Chris (who was the only one who had to finance his own life) and the offices. Towards the end, there were a few employees who also had to be paid. So we sought closer ties with publishers, which led to a collaboration with Software 2000 at the time." So as a last-ditch effort, Kaiko tried something different from its arcade roots. "After the release of *Super Gem'Z* failed, we looked for a title that would fit well into Software 2000's portfolio, but we found the usual management games boring. That's how the idea for *Software Manager* came about," Peter recalls. Indeed, *Software Manager* is a huge departure from Kaiko's previous games – but sadly, that change of course wasn't enough – 1995 was Kaiko's last year, leaving some promising, unfinished projects behind.

"Frank came up with Miss Honeybee and some very cute platforming characters," Peters says. "We made a demo and were really keen on doing a game like that, but it just never happened. In fact, we even fantasised about two games, *Miss Honeybee And The Shock Of Magic* and *Miss Honeybee Versus The Big Bad Hornet*. But apart from a level with a few enemies and some platforming, there was nothing more. *Record Of The Elf Saga* was a collaboration with a developer from Software 2000, but that took place when I was no longer part of Kaiko and was working as a freelancer finishing *Turrican III*, so I can't say much about it."

And yet, Kaiko – in a way – came back not too long ago, as Peter explains. "In 2014, I founded a new company called Unit 4 games. In 2015, we were about to release the remastered version of *Legend Of Kay* when we were asked by a Dutch company, Unit 4, to stop using the name. I needed a new name very quickly. Knowing that the trademark for Kaiko had expired and was available, I wrote to my former colleagues and asked if I could use it for my company. So basically, it was born out of necessity. For several years, we remastered some great projects, a business we were well positioned for thanks to our high level of technical expertise. In 2021, we became part of THQ Nordic. With THQ Nordic's parent company, Embracer Group, having run into trouble, we face many uncertainties on the horizon, but we are still making games."

We can only hope Peter's team will keep on doing so in the future! ✱

» [PlayStation] In its last days, Kaiko was working on the unreleased PlayStation game *Record Of The Elf Saga*.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

CATCHING UP WITH THE MAIN PLAYERS OF THE KAIKO STORY

image by Joachim Hesse!

PETER THIEROLF

After leaving Kaiko, Peter Thierolf went to the studio Neon, where he programmed the Saturn version of *Tunnel B1* and the 3D platform adventure *The Legend Of Kay* for the PS2. For the remaster of the latter, he founded his current company Kaiko. His other projects include *Kingdoms Of Amalur: Re-Reckoning* and *Red Faction: Guerrilla – Re-Mars-tered*.

FRANK MATZKE

After his time at Kaiko, cofounder Frank Matzke became product manager at Sierra Coktel, where he was involved in the German releases of Sierra's games. He also stayed during various buyouts and mergers with Havas and Vivendi. During that time, he became vice president of Sierra Online Europe. Today, he´s general manager at Zenimax studio Bethesda Softworks in Frankfurt am Main.

CHRIS HÜLSBECK

In 2026, Chris Hülsbeck is one of the most recognisable game composers in the world, having worked on games like the *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* series, *Giana Sisters: Twisted Dreams* and *Tiny Thor*. He resides in the United States and works on new soundtracks and rereleases of his compositions. One of his most recent works was composing the closing theme of Digital Foundry's retro podcast DF Retro Super Show.

ANIME & MANGA

■ In the early Nineties, Japanese popular culture made its first steps into the West and Frank Matzke really was into the style. Hence, almost every Kaiko game went for a typical Japanese look. Today, it's fascinating to see these first Western variants of that particular style.

BESPOKE BUDGET LABEL

■ Kaiko even had a short-lived sub-label called New Bits On The Ram. Two rather simple, but fun games – *The Adventures Of Quik & Silva* and *Metal Law* – were produced by a different team and published on coverdisks of German Amiga magazine *Amiga Fun*.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

R-TYPE III

THE THIRD LIGHTNING

THEY SAY THAT LIGHTNING DOESN'T STRIKE TWICE, YET JUDGING BY THE SUBTITLE TO R-TYPE III, IREM HOPED TO PROVE THAT WRONG AND GO ONE BETTER. JOIN US AS WE REVISIT THE RESPECTED SUPER NINTENDO SHOOTER, IN ANTICIPATION OF THE REIMAGINED VERSION THAT'S LAUNCHING THIS YEAR

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

» Here's the stunning uncropped cover artwork, painted by illustrator Mark Heine.

» [SNES] The enhanced Beam weapon was perfect for cutting a swathe through the Bydo scum.

R-Type has its roots firmly in the arcades, with the original 1987 coin-op and its 1989 sequel being two of the most popular titles during that golden era of the side-scrolling shooter. These days the series lives on outside of the arcades, on home systems, and that shift can be traced back to 1993 and the release of *R-Type III: The Third Lightning*.

The previous year Irem had released *R-Type Leo*, a progressive arcade entry that made bold changes to the established gameplay. Gone were two of the core features – the Wave Cannon, which could be charged up to deliver a devastating cross-screen blast, and the Force, the indestructible orb that you attached to the front or rear of your ship, or set it free like a gambolling space child. New weaponry was introduced in their absence, but such changes to a successful formula naturally drew criticism. It was later revealed that the game began life as an original shmup developed by a new team before it was pulled apart and rebuilt as an *R-Type* game. While it was no bomb – it looked absolutely lovely, and included two-player co-op for the first time in the series – *R-Type Leo* was more of an off-shoot than a true sequel.

"YOU COULD SWITCH BETWEEN THE BEAM AND THE NEW HYPER MODE, WHICH UNLEASHED AN INTENSE BARRAGE OF PLASMA SHOTS"

There were no conversions of *Leo* (a Mega Drive version was under consideration at one time by Irem), but fans looking to play more *R-Type* at home didn't have to wait too long to face those Bydo space baddies once more. *R-Type III* was developed by Irem's Tokyo subsidiary Tamtex and released exclusively for the Japanese Super Famicom in December 1993, and arrived on the SNES the following year. After *Leo*, the game was a welcome return to familiar territory, with enough tweaks and additions to justify its sequel status. Your ship was the new R-90, which featured an enhanced Wave Cannon. It could be charged up to 200%, like the R-9C in *R-Type II*, only now it delivered a concentrated mega blast, rather than a spread shot. In addition, you could switch between the Beam and the new Hyper mode which, when fully charged, unleashed an intense barrage of plasma shots. It was super powerful, especially against larger foes and bosses, so to nerf it, it would eventually overheat and you'd have to wait several agonising seconds while it cooled down, during which time you couldn't use the Wave Cannon at all.

Further increasing the tactical play, there were now three Force devices to choose from. The classic Force, now named Round ▶

GETTING ADVANCED

WAS THE 2004 GBA VERSION A MARVEL OF MINIATURISATION?

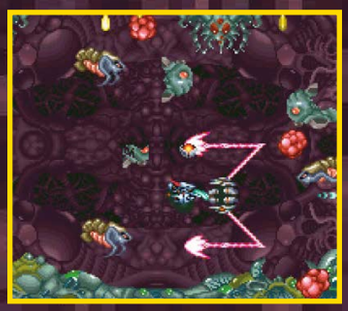
■ The GBA received a large number of SNES ports and *R-Type III* was one of the more welcome ones, seeing as it had never been released for any other system. It was ported by Italian developer Raylight Studios, who was best known for developing real-time 3D games on the GBA like *Wing Commander: Prophecy*. Overall, Raylight did a fine job, with a couple of exceptions: the sound was a little off and the collision detection was a little out. On the upside, a password system was added so you didn't have to keep starting over. Back in **RG** 11, your correspondent awarded the game 83%, calling it, "A perfect companion cart to *R-Type DX* on the Game Boy Color." We'll stand by that.

» [Game Boy Advance] *R-Type III*'s sprites were slightly altered to work better on the handheld's small screen.

» The game was exclusive to the Super Nintendo and soon gained a reputation as one of the system's best shmups.

DEEP SPACE STRATEGIES

TIPS TO HELP YOU SURVIVE THE BYDO THREAT



SHADOW PLAY

■ The Shadow Force isn't the first choice for most players, but it does include the Reverse Laser, perhaps the most useful weapon in the game. Grab a Red Crystal and say goodbye to anything behind you. It saves you having to keep moving the Force to your six.

HYPER ACTIVE

■ The updated Beam weapon is great; the new Hyper mode is even better. Use it regularly, especially against guardians. If you have Bit Devices, they will circle your ship, providing protection while you unleash hell. Just remember to factor in the cool-down period.

YELLOW PERIL

■ The Yellow Crystal was always the one to avoid in the first two *R-Type* games and it's no different here. You'd think they would have improved the yellow weapons for the two new Force devices, but no, they're pretty rubbish. Stick to the trusted red and blue instead.

NIGHTMARE MODE

■ If you somehow manage to beat the game, you will start the second loop, aka Advanced Mission, which is even harder. Enemies are faster, shoot more frequently, and take extra shots to destroy. Our vital tip here is: don't bother. It's not worth it. Go outside. Breathe.

» [SNES] Mode 7 activated! Here, in the opening stage, rotation effects are cleverly incorporated into the gameplay.

» [SNES] He's no longer the first-stage boss, but you just knew that old Dobkeratops would be lurking in the shadows somewhere.

▶ Force, returned and operated in the same way as in the original. It was joined by the Shadow Force and the Cyclone Force. These new forces came with their own lasers and also had unique capabilities when detached from your ship. Most players naturally chose the Round Force out of familiarity, but it was actually the least effective option. The other two Forces were more powerful, overall, but it admittedly took a little longer to adapt to how they operated, especially knowing when to push and pull when the Force was 'loose'.

Regardless of which Force you chose, *R-Type III* was a difficult game. The first two entries were no cakewalks – this was *R-Type* after all, not *Rugrats In Paris* – but the third was something else. Of the six stages, it was the fourth, set inside a giant foundry that featured a nightmarish maze-like section where you had to avoid molten metal flows. The problem was: there was no time to react if you found yourself in the wrong area, so the whole section relied on memorising the correct path. And just when you figured it out, through endless retries, you had to navigate the whole section again, *in reverse*. It was perhaps the only point in the series to date that felt cheap and unfair.

"THE FIFTH STAGE FEATURED A BRILLIANT BOSS RUSH..."

For seasoned *R-Type* players, it no doubt provided the challenge they sought, and as per usual, there were two loops and only by completing the second Advanced Mission would you reach the true ending. It's a shame that stage four presented such a difficulty spike as the fifth stage featured a brilliant boss rush (those are three words we never thought we'd use together). Here, you faced four guardians pulled from the first two games, including one of the most iconic bosses in shmup-dom, Dobkeratops, from the opening stage of *R-Type*. The whole sequence was accompanied by a remix of the original *R-Type* boss theme, adding an extra dollop of nostalgia.

The game scored multiple positive reviews on release. "*R-Type III* is more of the same, just more technically refined," wrote *CVG* magazine, which awarded it 88%. "Gone is the slowdown, the jerky graphics..." This appraisal was exactly what fans wanted to hear, as the previous SNES entry, *Super R-Type*, an updated version of *R-Type II*, famously suffered from slowdown when the ▶

» [SNES] Watch out below! The third stage features a series of tricky vertical sections.

» [SNES] The game features some proper pyrotechnics, with only a hint of slowdown and flicker here and there.

» [SNES] The hellish stage four foundry is a test of resolve – and memory. It's a good job there are checkpoints and unlimited continues.

» [SNES] There are shades of *Salamander* here as you voyage deeper into the game.

DEVELOPER Q&A

FRANCESCO PADUANO OF RAYLIGHT STUDIOS SHARES THE STORY BEHIND THE GBA VERSION

HOW DID RAYLIGHT STUDIOS BECOME INVOLVED IN THE GBA CONVERSION?

We really wanted to work on a historic series like *R-Type*. So in 2002, we approached Irem and proposed porting *R-Type III* to the GBA, as it was previously only available on the SNES. We created a demo of the first level, to show Irem that we were capable of the job. At the same time, we contacted the Korean publisher Phantagram with a proposal to acquire the licence from Irem. We facilitated introductions between Irem and Phantagram, leading to an agreement for the licensing, development and publication of the title. But after a few months Phantagram halted development due to financial difficulties and eventually shut down. We proposed to Destination Software Interactive (DSI), an American publisher we had previously collaborated with, to acquire the rights to *R-Type III*, as the project was already at an advanced stage. DSI agreed, allowing us to complete the development.

» Francesco Paduano was half of the two-man team that handled the GBA conversion's graphics.

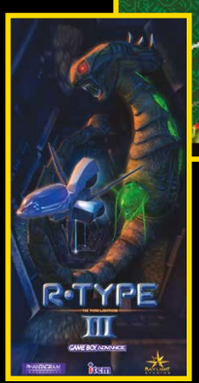
> "A TINY TEAM OF FIVE OR SIX PEOPLE MANAGED TO PORT SUCH A RENOWNED TITLE"

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE IN THE CONVERSION?

I'm one of the three cofounders of Raylight, along with Fausto Cardone and Massimiliano Di Monda. For *R-Type III*, I converted all the graphics into pixel art, working alongside artist Raffaele Grande.

WERE YOU ABLE TO GRAB THE SPRITES AND BACKGROUNDS FROM THE SNES VERSION?

Irem provided no support or assets. We had to come up with a workaround where our team played the game while we recorded the screen. We then extracted and cleaned up the graphics manually. In some cases, we had to recreate graphics from scratch. For certain elements, like some of the bosses, we had to construct a 3D rig to generate movements using inverse kinematics, similar to what some advanced 2D animation software does today. At the time, this was all experimental work.



DO YOU THINK IREM HAD LOST THE ORIGINAL SNES CODE AND ASSETS?

I can't tell you exactly, but Irem certainly said at the time that it didn't have backups of the project available, so we had to make do on our own.

HOW LONG DID THE DEVELOPMENT OF R-TYPE III LAST?

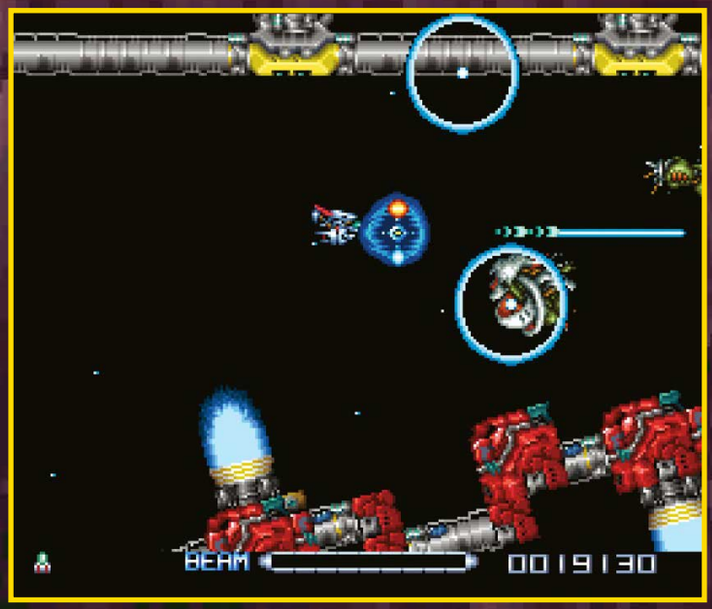
As mentioned, the project began with Phantagram and was completed with DSI. There was a period of inactivity while we awaited DSI's decision. If I had to give a rough estimate, I'd say it took around five to six months.

HOW PERSONALLY SATISFIED WERE YOU WITH THE GAME?

Considering that, with no support from anyone, a tiny team of five or six people managed to port such a renowned title as *R-Type III*, is undoubtedly a source of satisfaction. Of course, there are regrets about certain phases of the game that could have been improved. Unfortunately, the publisher decided that the game must be finished, no ifs or buts…

WAS THERE NO POSSIBILITY OF EXTENDING THE DEADLINE TO POLISH THE GAME?

Like every publisher, DSI also had scheduled milestones, so when you get close to the deadline, there is often no possibility of extending the development by a few weeks to better fix any issues. You have to settle for the best result achievable under the circumstances. From a graphical standpoint, I'm satisfied because, even though we had to perform some acrobatics to recreate the graphics, we managed to adapt it excellently to the GBA.



FEEL THE FORCE

HOW THE THREE DIFFERENT FORCE DEVICES STACK UP

ROUND FORCE

The original Force returns. It has the same weaponry as in *R-Type*, losing the green and grey lasers that were added in the first sequel. It can't be beaten when it comes to ease of use, but the two new Forces offer a range of improvements, so don't disregard them.

SHADOW FORCE

This one can take a little getting used to, but it's worth persevering with. It's a real handful when detached, and can be retrieved faster than the other two. The Reverse Laser (Red Crystal) and All Range Laser (Blue Crystal) are two other good reasons to select this.

CYCLONE FORCE

Cyclone is unique in that when detached, it's passive and does not fire, operating more like a shield. It deals huge damage on contact, so it's ideal for targeting a guardian's weak point. The Through Laser (Red Crystal) is excellent as it has extra penetrative power.

BOSS RUSH

HOW TO TURN THE GAME'S GUARDIANS INTO SPACE DEBRIS

GUARD RAY

STAGE 1

The first boss is shy, lurking in the shadows and firing at you from a distance, before zooming towards the screen. When it's on your plane it fires a flurry of homing missiles at you.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Dodge its fire while it's in the background, then charge up Hyper as it approaches. As soon as you're face to face, hit it with Hyper and it crumples like tin foil.

NECROSAUR

STAGE 2

It's a gun wall, of the cellular kind, that ejects flying eyeballs and glowing orbs of death. Keep focussed on its beady eye, which moves up and down, opening and closing.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: This is a dodge-'em-up. Charge up your Beam while avoiding the projectiles. The only way to damage it is a blast directly into its peeper when it opens it up.

COURSE CRAB

STAGE 3

Click-click-clickety-click. This giant crustacean scampers quickly along the left-hand wall, firing slow-moving shots. Just watch out for its bulk. Occasionally it leaps towards the right.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Start with your Force at the rear and destroy the knobbly things on its head. Then nip under its legs when it jumps and target its undercarriage with Beam blasts.

RECOJUNATOR

STAGE 4

This mid-stage boss is basically a large orb that hides behind protective blockers. It's defended by turrets that move along the top and bottom of the screen, firing constantly.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Let your Force do most of the work. Hold it on the blockers to destroy them, then punish that orb. You need to destroy the orb three times. Ignore the turrets, it's a waste of time.

CREATURE 666

STAGE 4

This spiky urchin moves in a clockwise direction, gradually speeding up as the screen starts to rotate. Watch out for the *Qix*-like Sparx that patrol the tracks along the wall.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Began by hitting it hard with Hyper to weaken it, then keep moving to avoid it while your cannon cools down. A few more standard laser shots will see it off.

DOBKERATOPS

STAGE 5

After a barrage of shots, Phantom Cell will morph into a very familiar foe. You need to watch out for its swishing tail and the stream of shots fired by the little green critter in its belly.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Come on, this is R-Type 101. Stay back and fire the Force into its midriff. Hold it there and it'll damage the green head every time it pops out. It then morphs again…

» [SNES] *Super R-Type* was essentially a conversion of *R-Type II* with a new opening stage bolted on.

» [PlayStation 5] The new version features reimagined visuals, but you can instantly switch to the original SNES graphics if you wish.

"R-TYPE III HAS BEEN AWOKEN FROM ITS CRYOGENIC SLUMBER SEVERAL TIMES OVER THE YEARS"

screen was busy (which was very often). *R-Type III* didn't solve the slowdown problem completely, but it was far less noticeable. *CVG* also praised the "clever Mode 7 effects", referring to the SNES' custom graphics mode which was used most notably in the opening stage to rotate the space station and scale its guardian. *Super Gamer* magazine gave it 91% and had similar thoughts about the presentation, "Graphics are coin-op quality, sound is excellent – and it's bloody hard!" It was hard, but again, in an improvement over *Super R-Type*, at least now there were mid-stage checkpoints to make progress less painful. US monthly *GameFan* scored it 88% and compared it favourably to a rival Mega Drive shooter. "Next to the sterling *Thunder Force IV*, this is the best side-scrolling shooter I've played in a long time. What happened to this great genre? It sure felt good to fly again." Yes, in 1994, reviewers were looking back on the shooter's 2D heyday with nostalgia. Had their time really passed? If we use the *R-Type* series as a barometer, it remained dormant until 1998, when it was revived for the PlayStation with *R-Type Delta*, the first entry to use polygonal graphics.

***R-Type III*, specifically, has been awoken from its cryogenic slumber several times over the years.** It was converted to the Game Boy Advance in 2004 and you can read more about that release elsewhere in this feature. In 2006, the SNES version was added to the Wii Virtual Console, leading to positive reappraisals. In 2018, Retro-Bit licensed the game and included it in a SNES multi-cart (along with *Super R-Type*) and its Super Retro-Cade device. But the big news comes this year as Irem and ININ Games release *R-Type Dimensions III* for multiple modern formats. The title does require some decoding. This is *R-Type III* given the *Dimensions* treatment that developer Tozai previously used to update the first two games for the HD era. As before, you can flick between the original pixels and new 3D visuals on the fly. It also delivers on a couple of long-standing fan requests: the Advanced Mission is unlocked from the beginning, and you can now team up with a second player for some cosmic co-op capers. Plenty of other improvements are promised, but at its heart is the SNES original, finally receiving a wide release more than two decades after it first took flight. ★

RIOS
STAGE 5

■ The big tank from *R-Type II* returns. It fires indestructible green lasers from its central orb, which is its weak point. It moves around the screen, looking more menacing than it really is.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: As with the boss' previous form, retreat and let the Force chip away at its vulnerable orb. While that's happening, charge up Hyper and use it to speed up matters.

GOMANDER
STAGE 5

■ Another familiar face (if it indeed has one). As before, it doesn't move but it is protected by the Outslay that emerge from its body and snake around the screen, firing at you.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: There are a couple of methods that involve targeting its eye that momentarily opens. Either 200% Beam blast it, or get in close and hold the Force on it to destroy it.

SHELL
STAGE 5

■ The final returnee. You'll remember this from the opening stage of *R-Type*, where it was just an obstacle. Now it's on steroids, and it spins up to crazy speeds, making it a real challenge.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: The technique is the same. You just need to extinguish the blue orb on one of its segments. Do this pretty quickly with a 200% Beam before the damn thing gets up to speed.

PHANTOM CELL
STAGE 5

■ Now that all of its forms have been defeated, Phantom Cell returns and it's not pleased. It continues to lock onto your position and now fires a barrage of shots in all directions.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Hopefully you've charged up Hyper after defeating Shell. Hit it with that, then keep moving to avoid its ceaseless advance. Lure it over to the right side of the screen.

MOTHER BYDO
STAGE 6

■ The final battle is a multi-stage affair. It begins with a frantic fight against Mother in her lair, then moves to a deep space showdown where she attempts one final desperate play.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Hold the Force on her head, retreating only when she spits out Space Invaders. When in space, flip the Force to your rear and use it to force her into the vortex. Goodbye!

Rocket: Robot On Wheels

MARIO GETS SOME COMPETITION

» NINTENDO 64 » 1999 » SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS

I've had so much fun with the Analogue^{3D} that I started browsing eBay for those few remaining N64 games I still wanted to own. After a lot of deliberating I dropped £175 on *Rocket: Robot On Wheels*, a game I've always wanted to play, but had been put off by its luxurious price tag.

While the entry price was certainly not cheap, I've sunk nearly 20 hours into the game now and I genuinely believe that it should sit with *Super Mario 64* and *Banjo-Kazooie* as one of the top three platformers on the console.

If you didn't know already, *Rocket* was the debut game by Sucker Punch Productions, a studio that is now synonymous with Sony's PlayStation thanks to hit franchises like *Sly Racoon*, *Infamous* and the *Ghost Of Tsushima* games. All of those games are known for their creativity and believable game worlds and it can all be traced back to *Rocket*.

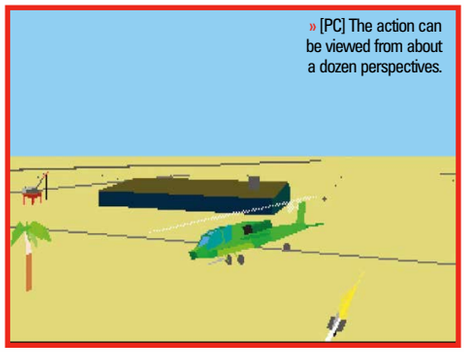
Within a couple of hours play, it's easy to understand why *Rocket* is so highly regarded, as the game simply bursts with inventive setpieces and creativity. One minute you're racing a car around a clown-themed island, the next you're clambering around the innards of a giant mechanical T-rex or repainting yourself so you can slip by a robotic Roman guard.

Each themed level is filled with tickets to collect and you're offered abstract clues on how to reach them (similar to the messages that appear at the start of each *Super Mario 64* mission). It adds a fair amount of experimentation during play, which is bolstered by the many vehicles that your robot can use on each of the game's worlds.

If I have one complaint with the game it is that you unlock your abilities a little too early, meaning beyond the reward of a ticket, there's little incentive to find the tokens on each stage (which are used to unlock your skills).

Still, that's a very small slight on an otherwise highly entertaining game. Is it worth the high amount of money I paid for it? Of course not, but there's no denying I've had a tremendous amount of fun with it. It's easily one of the N64's best platformers and considering the sheer amount available on the system, that's high praise indeed. ✱

» [PC] The more hits you take, the more parts of your helicopter break. Even the pilot can be hit.



» [PC] The action can be viewed from about a dozen perspectives.

» [PC] In the intro, the LHX and EA logos swirl through the 3D space in a very demoscene-y way.

THE MAKING OF LHX ATTACK CHOPPER

INTEREST IN FLIGHT SIMULATORS SOARED IN THE LATE-EIGHTIES AND EARLY NINETIES, THANKS TO THE INCREASED POWER OF HOME COMPUTERS DURING THIS TIME. BRENT IVERSON EXPLAINS HOW A PLANNED PROTOTYPE INSPIRED HIS OWN HELICOPTER SIMULATOR FOR ELECTRONIC ARTS

WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ

The basic concept of the helicopter is an ancient one: the Chinese were already using the 'bamboo-copter' as a toy in the 3rd century CE. Leonardo Da Vinci's *Paris Manuscripts* (from the late 15th century) contained the concept of the so-called 'aerial screw', which correctly captured the basic aerodynamic requirements of helicopter flight. But of course, like so many things from Da Vinci's mind, it was far ahead of its time.

The first functional helicopter did not take off until the 1920s, but the concept remained more of a curiosity for many decades afterwards. It was not until the Vietnam War that models such as the Bell UH-1 troop carrier and the Bell AH-1 Cobra combat helicopter were used in a military capacity. And after that, helicopters finally gained considerable attention through media spectacles such as *Blue Thunder* or *Airwolf*.

Sooner or later, of course, they also found their way into computer and videogames, especially in games such as *Choplifter* (1982) and *Gunship* (1986). Which brings us directly to Brent Iverson, chief developer of *LHX Attack Chopper*. After graduating from the University Of Michigan in 1984 with a degree in computer science, he wanted to become an artist – but computer games were in the way of those plans. He joined the up-and-coming company Electronic Arts, where he first ported the successful Amiga graphics programme Deluxe Paint 2 to IBM PCs and the Apple 2GS. After that he set about developing a helicopter flight simulator in 1988.

This development took quite a long time, "Two years is a while, but back then games were mostly created from scratch," he tells us. "So this included writing the 3D renderer (starting by reading Foley and van Dam, then figuring out what to do since 4x4 floating-point matrices were way too slow) and the game itself. It was a long slog, but I was very motivated since it was my first opportunity to make a game professionally."

FROM PC TO MEGA DRIVE

THE GENESIS OF A FLIGHT SIMULATOR

» [Mega Drive] From a technical perspective, *LHX Attack Chopper* did impressive things on the Mega Drive. It just didn't play well.

■ About two years after its original release, *LHX Attack Chopper* also landed on the Sega Mega Drive. All in all, the conversion was solid, offering most of the missions from the original, greatly simplified controls (which allowed two players at the same time), some voice acting and even new music. But unfortunately there isn't much else positive to report: two helicopters (the Blackhawk and the Osprey) had to be cut out, the order of the missions is no longer your choice, but predetermined. And the poor Mega Drive is hopelessly underpowered for the (admittedly impressive) 3D graphics by Chris Ebert and slows to a crawl with the slightest enemy encounter! As a technical demo, *LHX Attack Chopper* on the Mega Drive was great, but as a game it was unfortunately not worth your time or money.

This version of *LHX Attack Chopper* was the third and last game to be released under the EA Air Force label. The first was *F-22 Interceptor* (1991) developed by Lerner Research, the second *Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf* (1992). EA Air Force was not the company's only very short-lived label – but at least it lasted a little longer than EA Interactive Stories, for example, as this one had just one game under its banner (1992's *The Lost Files Of Sherlock Holmes*).

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **DEVELOPER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **PLATFORM:** PC, MEGA DRIVE
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** FLIGHT SIMULATOR

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PC
RELEASED: 1991

US NAVY FIGHTERS
PLATFORM: PC
RELEASED: 1994

007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING
PLATFORM: XBOX, PS2, GAMECUBE
RELEASED: 2004

If you consider the in-game credits, the intro screen or the front of the packaging, you might think that Brent developed the game completely on his own. But this was by no means the case, as he confirms. "There were nearly two dozen people with various levels of involvement. It's a great reminder that, 'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.' Paul Grace (producer) and Scott Cronce (technical director) were indispensable, and a number of other folks made great contributions in engineering, graphics, audio, documentation, testing, and other areas. Electronic Arts always had a deep bench of talented, fun people. Scott just reminded me that I was disappointed I wasn't able to create all the missions and maps myself. But there was so much to do, and it turned out really well to have other skilled hands helping. Nevertheless, I gained ten pounds in the last month from spending all my waking hours working!"

> "I GAINED TEN POUNDS FROM SPENDING ALL MY WAKING HOURS WORKING"
> **BRENT IVERSON**

Development was done exclusively on PCs of the time, as Brent explains, "With a 4.77MHz processor that doesn't do floating-point maths, the first version of any code won't be fast enough. Almost everything was written in C before being converted to 8088 assembly, even the most time-critical parts like 3D transforms, clipping, culling, collision and so on. While in C, it was easier to iterate on the math and logic, and add visualisations and other debugging aids to ensure it worked as expected. We ran a sampling profiler over and over and over on the entire code base. Every CPU hot-spot had to be dealt with: improve the algorithm, cycle-count the code to make it faster (minimise branches, memory access and math), update less frequently, etc. It was a never-ending process of clawing back performance, one-quarter per cent at a time. Because the game took so long to make, to keep me from going crazy, I would jump back and forth every few days between adding game features and optimising the code."

The finished game hit the stores in spring 1990, in very slick packaging that showed slightly confusing slogans such as "Fly the LHX before the army does!". The reason for this was that the eponymous LHX didn't even exist back then – and still doesn't today. The 'Light Helicopter Experimental' was just a development study by the US Army, which centred on replacing the outdated Cobra and Kiowa helicopters with a modern machine that was to be light, fast, quiet, difficult to detect by radar and heavily armed. The two aircraft manufacturers Boeing-Sikorsky and Bell/McDonnell Douglas were commissioned with the research in 1988. The result of the Bell/McDonnell Douglas Light Helicopter Super Team is what can be found in polygonised form in the game – but the plans were never closer to reality than here, as Brent confirms. "It was at least semi-real. Our LHX resembles the Bell/McDonnell Douglas proposal. There was no official data available though, just a variety of ▶

BRENT IVERSON

■ Brent was *LHX Attack Chopper*'s main designer and programmer. He remained with Electronic Arts for more than 30 years before switching to Amazon Game Studios. He is retired now.

» [PC] The missions take place at different times of day and night.

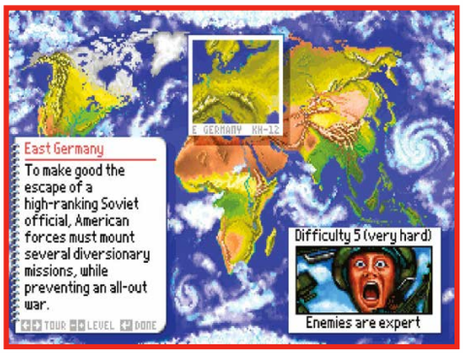
» [PC] The three combat theatres look very different to each other.

» [PC] Every enemy is potentially deadly – even 'Man With AK-47'.

renderings and 'what it could be' articles in magazines, so we made guesses."

The decision to make the LHX front and centre of the game wasn't planned from the beginning, "The title *LHX Attack Chopper* wasn't set until late in development," Brent explains. "It was always intended as a 'survey' simulation of multiple helicopters with no particular emphasis on any one of them. It would have been great to wrap everything into strategic resource management of an Army group with these different helicopters and weapons. And to have an extra year to design and write that feature."

After the sweet intro animation, you find yourself in the main menu, a desk cluttered with documents and a very sharp-looking


East Germany
To make good the escape of a high-ranking Soviet official, American forces must mount several diversionary missions, while preventing an all-out war.
Difficulty 5 (very hard)
Enemies are expert

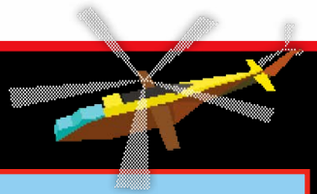
» [PC] The choice of difficulty level is represented by a pilot – the harder the difficulty, the more panicked his look.

» [PC] The game's doesn't take itself too seriously. One of the enemies you'll face is a camel. Or rather a dromedary, as it only has one hump.

Bowie knife. Here you choose the scenario from one of three combat theatres: Libya, Vietnam and East Germany. It should be noted that the game was developed while the Cold War was still a thing – the choice of scenarios is therefore just as unsurprising as is the choice of the Soviet Union as the enemy. You then choose a mission before you have to decide on one of four helicopters – more on these in the Blades Of Glory panel. All in all, there are around 30 missions that offer plenty of variety: sometimes you have to destroy a certain number of enemies, sometimes you have to pick up supplies and drop them over the target area, sometimes you have to rescue a crashed colleague, and occasionally you have to babysit a B-2 bomber. There is no set order to the missions here, and no storyline to link them – you simply pick one and stick to it until you receive your end-of-mission glory.

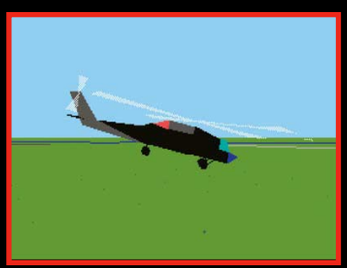
BLADES OF GLORY

THE FOUR CHOPPERS WAITING FOR YOU



AH-64 APACHE

The Boeing AH-64 is the workhorse of the US Army, the primary combat helicopter of the troops. In active service since 1986, the helicopter is primarily used for anti-tank defence, reconnaissance and air support, as it is heavily armed and very versatile. In *LHX Attack Chopper* it is a very solid choice for all combat missions.

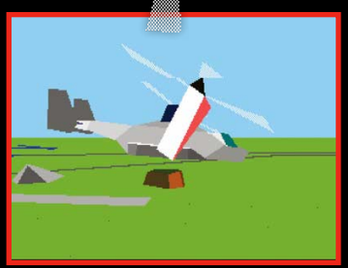


UH-60 BLACKHAWK

The Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk is a tactical transport helicopter that has actually been in active service as the US Army's primary assault platform since 1979. There are more than 30 variants of the helicopter in use with armies around the world. In *LHX Attack Chopper*, the Blackhawk is great for all kinds of transport missions that you have to undertake.

LHX

The LHX is a fictional helicopter with a radar-absorbing surface, no tail rotor and a belly full of high-tech – a futuristic machine that, unfortunately, was never more than a design study that ultimately led to the RAH-66 Comanche (read more about this one in issue 254). In the game, the LHX, like the Apache, is an excellent choice for combat missions.



V-22 OSPREY

The Bell Boeing V-22 Osprey is actually not just a helicopter but a tilt-rotor aircraft: its two proprotors can be positioned vertically or horizontally, which means it can fly either like a helicopter or like an aeroplane. The latter mode changes the controls considerably, but makes for a very interesting gaming experience. And gives you an extra boost of speed in tight situations.

» [PC] The 3D graphics may look quite simple from today's perspective, but in 1990 what was shown was excellent.

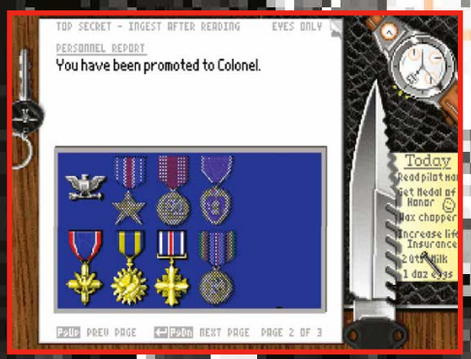
Which sounds easier than it is, mainly because a mission is only considered complete once you have returned safely to your home base. You can also land in the friendly territory surrounding that area if you absolutely cannot make it all the way back, but this will cost you a lot of points. Still, that is a much better outcome than the alternative. Because if you die in a mission, this death is permanent, as your last virtual breath deletes all of your progress, which means that you will have to start the campaign all over again! This is why it is highly recommended that you exit the game after successfully completing a mission, copy the LHX.CFG file to a secure backup folder and only then take on the next mission. Because if you mess it up, at least you won't lose your previous progress. So at its heart, *LHX Attack Chopper* is actually a Roguelike with permadeath.

The danger comes from the usual suspects of the time: Soviet aircraft like the Su-25 Frogfoot or Mig-27 Flogger, helicopters like the Mil Mi-24 Hind or the Ka-34 Hokum, tanks like the T-72 or the T-80, plus armed individuals or even the occasional camel. Which is not an enemy per se, but you never know. All of the enemies have realistic ammunition for their weapons, so they don't shoot around endlessly, but sooner or later run out of ammunition. But you shouldn't let it get that far, because the damage model of your own helicopter is impressively detailed for the year 1990: individual components such as hydraulic systems, one or both engines, weapon mounts or even the gas tank can be hit and destroyed separately, which has very noticeable and different effects. Also it can happen quite quickly, as even Brent was surprised to find out when replaying the game. "On one mission the very first enemy shot that hit me took out my tail rotor and I crashed. Which surprised me because I thought I coded it so that catastrophic damage couldn't happen only until after a few hits. These days we'd be a little more forgiving!"

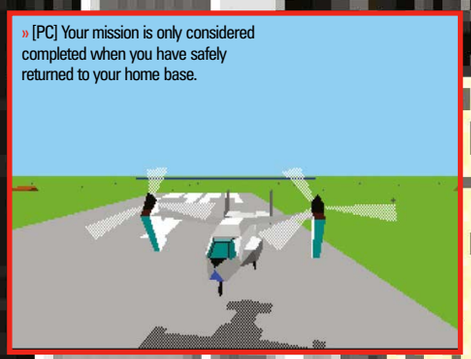
"THE TITLE LHX ATTACK CHOPPER WASN'T SET UNTIL LATE IN DEVELOPMENT"
BRENT IVERSON

Following the PC release, *LHX Attack Chopper* flew onto the Sega Mega Drive. The helicopter was also supposed to land on the Amiga, but this version was abandoned in the middle of development due to poor performance. Unfortunately, there were no further conversions of the game after that, nor was there a real sequel. At least the game's graphics system found more use, as Brent confirms, "We were able to reuse a lot of the code in *SU-25 Sturmovik*, *Seal Team*, *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*, and *F-117 Night Storm*."

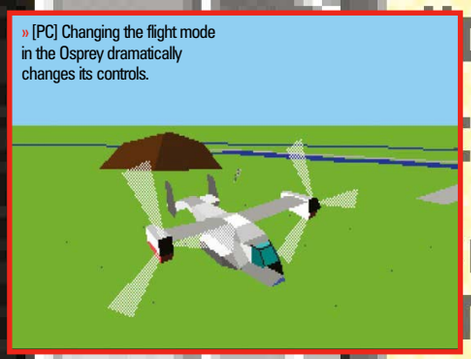
What remains to this day is a unique flight simulator, with a very unusual selection of vehicles and remarkably unforgiving gameplay: the relaxed take-off at your home base, the slow arrival into enemy airspace, the piercing warning signals when you are targeted by enemies, the shocking vibrations when enemy projectiles hit, the bursting instruments – and then, with a lot of skill and even more luck, the safe return to your landing field. It's really intense. Even today. ✱



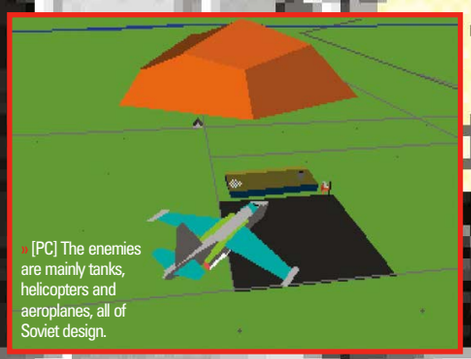
» [PC] Once a mission has been successfully completed, you earn points that allow you to rise in rank, from 2nd Lieutenant to Colonel – including fancy medals.



» [PC] Your mission is only considered completed when you have safely returned to your home base.



» [PC] Changing the flight mode in the Osprey dramatically changes its controls.



» [PC] The enemies are mainly tanks, helicopters and aeroplanes, all of Soviet design.

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

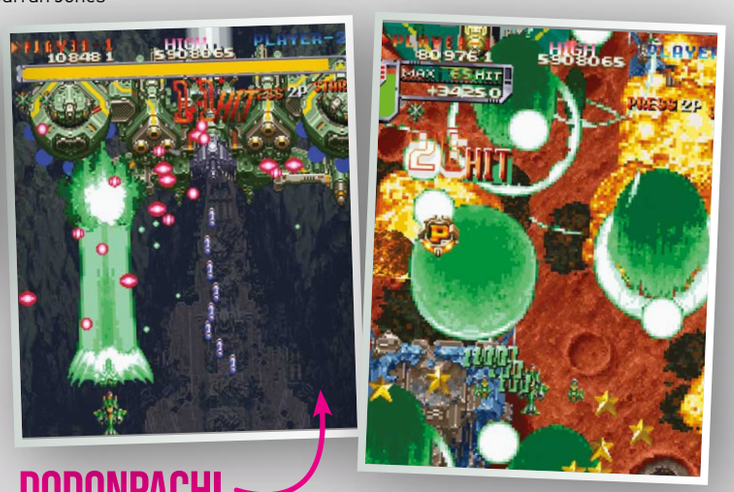
SATURN SHMUPS

SEGA'S 32-BIT CONSOLE WAS THE GO-TO SYSTEM IF YOU WANTED SENSATIONAL SHMUPS TO PLAY AT HOME. HERE WE PICK OUT SOME OF THE SATURN'S BEST EXAMPLES, JUST MAKE SURE YOU HAVE DEEP POCKETS!

Words by Darran Jones

RADIANT SILVERGUN

Recently released on modern consoles, Treasure's magnificent shmup remains a Saturn highlight. Granting you immediate access to all weapons helps separate it from its peers, while its wonderfully stylised visuals and distinctive array of challenging bosses adds to its appeal. It's all held together by a genuinely rousing soundtrack and some surprisingly deep scoring mechanics.



DODONPACHI

While *Donpachi* is also worthy of your time, this sequel improves on it in numerous ways. Many prefer the PlayStation port, but *DoDonPachi* on the Saturn remains a thrilling shooter with dense scoring mechanics, tough bosses and tight controls. Its Saturn mode delivers some neat extras like an extra level but it's the pureness of the game's mechanics that will keep you returning for one more run.

LAYER SECTION

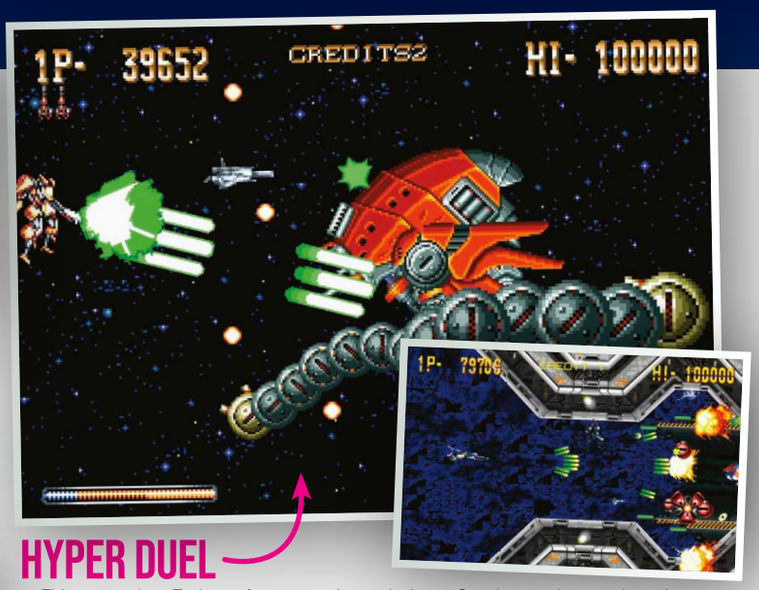
Taito's exceptional arcade game was treated to a truly phenomenal Saturn conversion and many consider it to be the finest shmup on the console. Simplicity lies at the heart of *Layer Section*'s appeal – while its power-ups are quite basic, the lock-on system it utilises is excellent and needs to be carefully used in order to dramatically boost your score.

BATSUGUN

With its scintillating soundtrack, polished visuals and extra modes, *Batsugun* is one of the Saturn's finest arcade ports. Considered by many as the progenitor of the bullet hell subgenre, *Batsugun* delivers frantic, fast-paced action, challenging enemy waves and some truly exhilarating boss fights. Like several of the games featured here, it's now available on modern systems.

TWINKLE STAR SPRITES

■ What do you get when you cross the competitive versus fun of *Puyo Puyo* with a shmup? The answer is many, many, many lost hours and a few fractured friendships. *Twinkle Star Sprites*' cute presentation and simple gameplay mechanics hide a devilishly moreish game that requires you to shoot down waves of enemies so you can send them over for your opponent to deal with. (And hopefully not have them sent back to you.)



HYPER DUEL

■ This tremendous Technosoft port remains exclusive to Sega's console, meaning prices on the second-hand market remain obscene. If you can justify the outlay you'll discover a solid *Thunder Force*-style shooter with over-the-top bosses and a neat mechanic that lets you switch between a sleek fighter and heavily armed mech. The Saturn version of the game greatly improves the game's visuals and lets you control your robot's direction of fire.

SEXY PARODIUS

■ The *Parodius* series has always thrived on absurdity but *Sexy Parodius* is on another level entirely. The biggest change to the series mechanically is the introduction of Missions, which range from collecting coins to defeating a certain number of enemies. It's also notable for its large range of playable characters and silly bosses that range from a popcorn-flinging corn on the cob to a cute Medusa.

DARIUS GAIDEN

■ Do you like otherworldly sounding music, humongous fishy bosses and alternate routes through your games? Then you're going to adore *Darius Gaiden*. It's a rather bare-bones port, but the level structure, fantastic pixel work and imaginative enemy designs make this one of the best shmups on the console. *Darius II* is also available on the Saturn as well if you crave more piscine action.

SOUKYUGURENTAI

■ Also known as *Terra Diver*, this is similar to *Radiant Silvergun* in that it uses a horizontal layout but the action scrolls vertically. Unlike Treasure's game it has a neat laser web lock-on mechanic, similar to *Layer Section*'s, but mixes things up by giving you three different ships to master. Its Saturn extras include a new practice mode, although it lacks the fourth ship and extra level found in the PlayStation port.

STRIKERS 1945 II

■ This alternative take on World War II features gigantic enemy craft that transform into equally gargantuan robots. It's an otherwise fairly basic take on the genre in many ways, but we're including it here because we love the individuality of each ship you can fly and the crazy design of the game's many bosses. The original is good fun as well.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

PANZER DRAGOON

DESPITE BEING MADE BY A BRAND-NEW TEAM AND FIRST-TIME DIRECTOR, PANZER DRAGOON DID NOT FEEL LIKE A FIRST FLIGHT. IT SOARED WITH THE CONFIDENCE OF A STUDIO ALREADY IN COMMAND OF ITS VOICE, EXPANDED THE SHOOTER GENRE, AND HINTED AT THE FUTURE CINEMATIC POTENTIAL OF VIDEOGAMES

WORDS BY JAMES TOCCHIO

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** TEAM ANDROMEDA
- **PLATFORM:** SATURN
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **GENRE:** RAIL SHOOTER

From the instant that *Panzer Dragoon*'s title card appears on the screen, you know you're in for something special. The brass horns of Yoshitaka Azuma's orchestration burst forth, joined moments later by the flowing strings and thundering percussion of one of gaming's most evocative themes.

From there, *Panzer Dragoon* strides forward with a surety usually associated with veteran auteurs, moving with the confidence of the later works of Fumito Ueda or Hideo Kojima; creators who know what they want to express, and who trust their audience to embrace a ambiguous story. *Panzer Dragoon* is all the more striking, then, when we consider its unusual origin and its seemingly unlikely creators; a director who had never directed, and a team's first ever project.

> "PANZER DRAGOON EMBODIED EVERYTHING THAT THE 32-BIT ERA PROMISED; EXTREME FIDELITY, MASSIVE TECHNOLOGICAL LEAPS AND THREE WHOLE DIMENSIONS"

In 1993, as Sega prepared to launch its new 32-bit console, the Sega Saturn, employees were invited to pitch concepts for games with an eye toward showcasing the system's capabilities. Yukio Futatsugi, then only 23 years old, proposed a vehicular 3D rail shooter in which the player could shoot in any direction. The pitch was approved for development, and within months, Futatsugi and Sega art director Manabu Kusunoki would find themselves the core creative leads at the head of Team

» [Saturn] Inspiration for *Panzer*'s aesthetic came from *Nausicaa Of The Valley Of The Wind*, and *Dune*.

» [Saturn] *Panzer*'s first stage was a statement, showcasing the console's stunning visual capabilities.

» [Saturn] The game's opening cinematic was a captivating and beautifully crafted eight-minute film.

Andromeda, a fifteen-person studio assembled to bring *Panzer Dragoon* to life.

The game they released did indeed debut as a showcase for the powerful new console (*Panzer Dragoon* launched alongside the Saturn in the USA and landed just one month after the system's debut in Europe). It was a technically astonishing game, a 3D rail shooter with mind-blowing graphics, engrossing CGI story scenes, a phenomenal soundtrack and visceral gameplay. It embodied everything that the 32-bit era promised; extreme fidelity, massive technological leaps and three whole dimensions.

But what has kept *Panzer Dragoon* relevant for fans of the series some three decades later is a little harder to pin down. Writing in a contemporaneous round-up of Saturn's launch titles for *Entertainment Weekly* on 9 June 1995, journalist Albert Kim may have hit on it. "The triumph of [*Panzer*] *Dragoon* is that you begin to think of it as a story, not just a game," he wrote. "If the Saturn can deliver more such experiences, then the videogame industry will have truly undergone a transformation."

Panzer Dragoon's makers were doing things with story and worldbuilding that very few studios of the era attempted, much less pulled off. Like the most captivating novels, films, and stories of all kinds, the girding that lifted ▶

THE SAGA CONTINUES

AN AERIAL VIEW OF PANZER DRAGOON'S SEQUELS

PANZER DRAGOON II ZWEI

SATURN • 1996

■ Development of *Panzer Dragoon*'s sequel began just months after the original game's release. Team Andromeda's familiarity with the Saturn hardware allowed it to create a technical and gameplay masterpiece. *Zwei* expanded the series' lore and established numerous thematic through-lines for *Saga*, the *Panzer Dragoon* RPG.

PANZER DRAGOON MINI

GAME GEAR • 1996

■ True to its name, this Game Gear spin-off is a miniature version of previous entries in the series. Like its predecessors, it's a rail shooter. But unlike previous *Panzer Dragoon* games, it is generally regarded as being quite bad (though its rarity today makes it very expensive).

PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

SATURN • 1998

■ An atmospheric, post-apocalyptic RPG designed to compete with *Final Fantasy VII*, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* is a legendary game for limitless reasons. Its development was tortured, its sales disappointing, its source code lost. Today *Saga* is often cited by journalists and retro gamers as the Saturn's greatest game.

PANZER DRAGOON ORTA

XBOX • 2002

■ Following *Saga*'s release, Team Andromeda disbanded, with some members transferring to other teams within Sega. One such team, Smilebit, created a gorgeous new *Panzer Dragoon*. Though *Orta* released to universal critical acclaim, sales were low, and fans haven't seen a wholly new game in the series since.

» [PC] Higher overall resolution and improved 3D models are found in the PC port.

CONVERTING PANZER DRAGOON

THE BLUE DRAGON FLIES BEYOND THE SATURN'S HORIZON

■ In 1996, *Panzer Dragoon* was ported to Windows-based PCs and released as a standalone game, as a set bundled with the Diamond Multimedia's Edge 3D NV1 PCI Card (Nvidia's first multimedia PCI graphics card), and finally as a software rendered version requiring an Intel Pentium P5 processor. While the PC version of the game is very similar to the Saturn release, it does offer a higher display resolution (640x480 compared with the Saturn's native 320x240). The PC release was also included as an unlockable bonus in the Xbox release of *Panzer Dragoon Orta*. Unfortunately, some FMV cutscenes have been clipped, altered, or removed, and several small graphical glitches exist in this PC port.

In 2006, *Panzer Dragoon* was ported to the PlayStation 2 as part of Sega's Japan-only standalone retro remakes known as the *Sega Ages 2500* collection. In addition to an original, unaltered port of the Saturn version, the *Sega Ages 2500* release includes an Arrange game mode which adds an anti-aliasing filter, improved textures, and updated 3D models for both the main character dragon and some of the game's enemies. The Pandora's Box option menu found in other *Panzer Dragoon* games makes an appearance here as well, allowing the player to unlock numerous extras, such as a gallery of artwork, a stage select mode, and more.

» [Saturn] The Imperial City stage is a polluted seaside slum.

▶ *Panzer Dragoon* then and what supports its continued fandom today is the game's rich lore, the parts of its story which are only hinted at, the depth of emotion behind the characters and the power of their relationships.

Throughout the late-Eighties and early Nineties, Sega had found success with arcade rail shooters in games like Yu Suzuki's *After Burner* and *Space Harrier*. However, these were 2D sprite-based games and limited in scope. In 1993, Nintendo expanded on what a rail shooter could be with its ground-breaking Super FX Chip-powered *Star Fox*. While *Star Fox* was massively successful for Nintendo, and though the Super FX Chip allowed for polygonal models and 3D scaling, the rail shooter as

BOSS RUSH

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR OUTFLYING PANZER'S BOSSES

NARAKA CLASS IMPERIAL BATTLESHIP

■ The first and easiest boss in the game is this mid-sized airship, a common tool of the Imperial Flying Navy.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: It attacks with a combination of bullets and large torpedoes. Use your lock-on attack to bombard the ship while shooting incoming projectiles with Kyle's gun.

PROTOTYPE DARK DRAGON

■ Your first clash with the villainous Dark Dragon, a harbinger of doom, the Empire's prototype weapon of mass destruction.

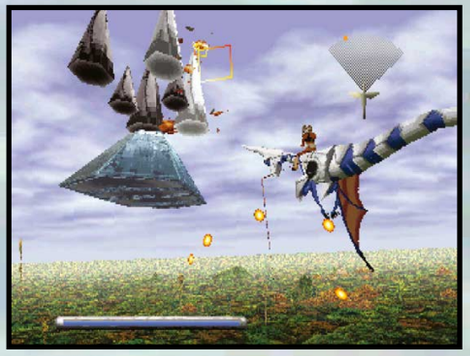
HOW TO BEAT THEM: Immediately start with lock-on attacks while dodging incoming bullets. Later, dodge the wide fanning wave attacks by flying up or down, and keep shooting.

IMPERIAL ASSAULT SHIP

■ Another of the Empire's powerful airships, this bladed boss has a complicated movement and assault system. It's the toughest fight yet.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: This ship attacks with giant blades, missiles, and bullets. Dodge the blades and destroy the missiles before they have a chance to split into multiple bullets.

» [Saturn] Team Andromeda made good use of transparency effects and reflections.



» [Saturn] Mini-bosses such as this Imperial battleship appear from time to time.

» [Saturn] The player and dragon's character models were exceptionally detailed for the time.

presented by *Star Fox* was still a fundamentally two-dimensional genre. Despite improved graphics and ever-evolving production quality, the rail shooter still delivered a relatively simple experience. Fly forward, dodge projectiles, shoot what's in front of you, and roll the credits.

For *Panzer Dragoon*, Futatsugi and his team envisioned something greater. Their rail shooter would carry the genre truly into the third dimension by giving the player 360-degrees of action, by allowing enemies to approach from any direction and to allow the player to rotate the camera at will to face and attack these oncoming threats.

Furthermore, Futatsugi and Team Andromeda envisioned a cinematic experience unlike any previously seen in arcade-style rail shooters. The game's opening film runs nearly eight minutes long, dense with 'show-don't-tell' exposition, scored to another of Azuma's lush orchestral compositions, it is directed and shot with striking confidence.

While waiting for Saturn dev kits to arrive, and to further achieve total player immersion, the team spent three months developing the game's lore, crafting character backstories, imagining and documenting even the most minuscule facets of the world of *Panzer Dragoon*. Futatsugi even created a fictional language for the game's cinematics, blending elements of ancient Greek, Latin and Russian. The team's dedication to creating narrative depth was obsessive.

> "THE GIRDING THAT LIFTED PANZER DRAGOON THEN AND WHAT SUPPORTS ITS CONTINUED FANDOM TODAY IS THE GAME'S RICH LORE"

In a 2019 interview, Futatsugi estimated that only about one-fifth of the material created ultimately made it into the final game. Before *Panzer Dragoon*, fans of rail shooters (and perhaps game players more broadly) had never been treated to such a fully realised world. Of course, none of this would matter if the game wasn't fun to play. Naturally, it is.

Panzer Dragoon's mechanical ambitions are apparent from the very first stage. As your dragon spreads its wings and the glittering

THE GUARDIAN

■ In the depths of an ancient excavation site, a monstrous biotech guardian is awakened by the presence of the Blue Dragon.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: This boss shields itself with its arms. Shoot them until they fall away and it'll attack with a deadly laser. Dodge, fire and don't stop moving.

IMPERIAL FLYING STRONGHOLD

■ The largest air ship yet, this flying fortress of the Imperial Navy is armed with seemingly endless cannons, missiles and torpedoes.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Destroy the accompanying battleships, then shoot the fortress' three rotating rows of cannons. Next, focus fire on the ship's underside while avoiding or destroying incoming projectiles.

PROTOTYPE DARK DRAGON (AGAIN)

■ The Dark Dragon has reached the Tower and activated its ancient evil. It transforms into a monster, and a monumental battle begins.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Constant movement, all while shooting lock-on attacks at the Dark Dragon. Dodge up and down to avoid the devastating tail swipe and beware the massive laser blast.

REMAKING PANZER DRAGOON

FOREVER ENTERTAINMENT CEO ZBIGNIEW DĘBICKI ON UPDATING A CLASSIC GAME

WHY CHOOSE TO REMAKE *PANZER DRAGOON*?

Panzer Dragoon is a cult classic that defined an entire generation of players, yet for many years it remained locked to legacy hardware. The series is known for its unique worldbuilding and gameplay that still feels distinctive today. Remaking *Panzer Dragoon* is about preservation as much as it is about renewal. We want to ensure these games are not lost to time and can be experienced by new audiences on modern platforms.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO CREATE AND WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE?

Remaking a classic like *Panzer Dragoon* is a multi-year process. These projects typically take several years because they are not simple ports. The biggest challenge was balancing authenticity with modernisation. The original game was built around very specific hardware limitations and design choices. Translating that to modern platforms while keeping the same pacing, atmosphere, and feel was a focal point of our work. Another challenge was reconstructing assets and systems, which meant carefully rebuilding environments, enemies, and animations from scratch.

HOW MUCH INPUT DID SEGA HAVE DURING DEVELOPMENT?

Sega is closely involved throughout the project. They provide valuable feedback on key milestones and ensure that the remake stays true to the spirit of the original. Their guidance helps us maintain the identity of *Panzer Dragoon* while allowing us to update visuals, interfaces and controls for today's players.

HOW DIFFICULT WAS IT TO IMPLEMENT MODERN CONTROLS INTO THE GAME?

It was one of the most delicate tasks. *Panzer Dragoon* games were designed around very specific controller layouts and player expectations from the Nineties. We wanted to make the remake comfortable for modern players without breaking the original flow. This meant offering multiple control schemes, fine-tuning camera behaviour, and adjusting responsiveness so that it feels natural on contemporary controllers.

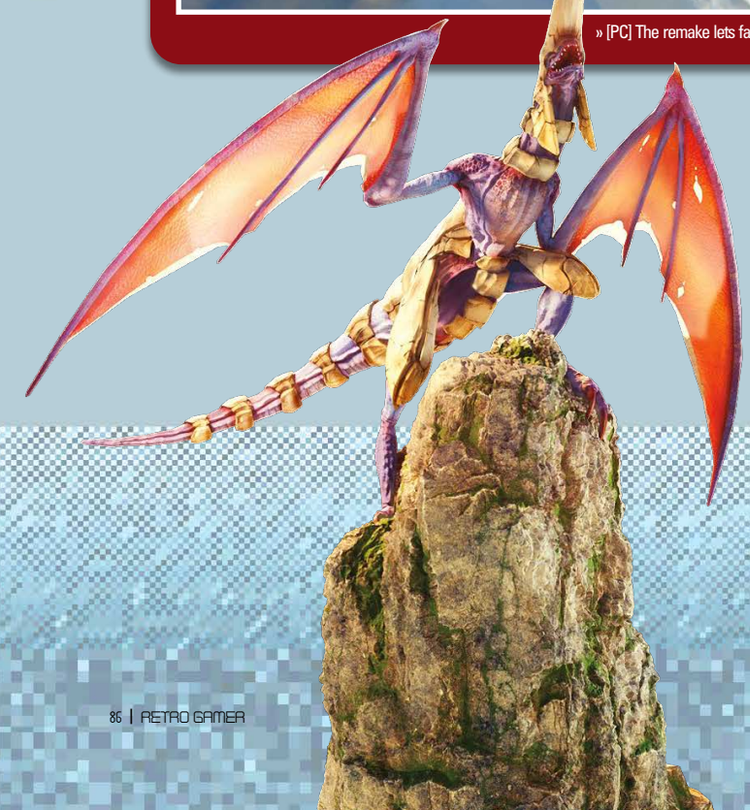
WHAT UPDATES ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF ABOUT THE REMAKE?

We are especially proud of the visual overhaul. The world of *Panzer Dragoon* is surreal and atmospheric, and bringing that to life with modern graphics and keeping its unique tone was essential. We are also proud of the quality-of-life improvements, such as the updated UI and smoother performance, which make the game more accessible without changing its core on-rails shooter design.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT PROGRESS ON *PANZER DRAGOON* ZWEI II REMAKE?

The project is progressing steadily. Our goal is to build on everything we have learned from the first remake and push the experience even further. We are focussing on refining systems and improving visual fidelity. While it is still in development, the team is very committed to delivering a remake that fans can be proud of and newcomers can fall in love with.

» [PC] The remake lets fans of the original fly again, now in gorgeous HD.



» [Saturn] It's a good job your dragon is highly maneuverable, as later attacks come thick and fast.

waves of a vast ocean slip by below, enemies begin to swarm from above, behind, ahead and to the sides. A simple press of the controller's left or right shoulder button rotates the camera, allowing you to reorient your view instantly. While the action still progresses on a predetermined flight path, the omnidirectional threat demands constant spatial awareness, transforming what would traditionally be a forward-facing rail shooter into something closer to an aerial skirmish.

The game's lock-on attack system, likely inspired by *After Burner*, is here developed into a central combat pillar. Pressing and holding the attack button allows the dragon to lock onto several targets at once; releasing it sends a barrage of homing attacks at all targeted foes. Tapping the same button fires a rapid burst from the dragon-rider's handgun. Together, these attacks introduce a subtle but meaningful layer of strategy, encouraging players to juggle attacks and find the most efficient way to defeat enemies. Boss encounters expand on this; massive creatures move dynamically about the player, attack in distinct phases, and demand careful defence alongside intelligent offence.

All this unfolds across seven stages spanning a vast continent of deadly deserts, deep canyons, ancient ruins and underground facilities left abandoned by long-extinct empires. Over the game's brief two-hour playtime, there's a maintained sense of escalation and variety. Each new stage is visually distinct, each boss more imposing than the last, until the journey's end resolves in an epic battle and emotional climax.

> "EACH NEW STAGE IS VISUALLY DISTINCT, EACH BOSS MORE IMPOSING THAN THE LAST, UNTIL THE JOURNEY'S END RESOLVES IN AN EPIC BATTLE AND EMOTIONAL CLIMAX"

On debut, *Panzer Dragoon* was widely praised by magazines and critics, many of whom highlighted its stunning graphics and soundtrack as standout achievements for the nascent Saturn. The game's sense of scale, its sweeping score, and its mechanical innovation were cited as evidence that videogames could aspire to cinematic storytelling without sacrificing fun and interactivity.

Commercially, however, *Panzer Dragoon* was limited by the Saturn's uneven global performance. While the game found an enthusiastic fanbase, it never achieved the mainstream penetration that its critical reception suggested it deserved, an unfortunate trend which continued with its sequels.

In retrospect, *Panzer Dragoon* was a game ahead of its time. It elevated the rail shooter both technically and artistically, served as a defining showcase for a historically important game system, and helped to pioneer a cinematic approach to storytelling at a time when the medium was still finding its voice. It blazed a bold and beautiful path toward a distant horizon. Three decades later, it still soars in the hearts of many.

A MUSICAL ODYSSEY

THE UNUSUAL SOURCE OF PANZER DRAGOON'S EVOCATIVE SOUNDTRACK

Though Sega boasted an impressive roster of in-house musicians and composers throughout the Eighties and Nineties, Team Andromeda made the interesting decision to outsource the making of *Panzer Dragoon*'s soundtrack to composer Yoshitaka Azuma.

A synthesiser performer celebrated for his solo albums and distinctive soundscapes, Azuma was known for blending classical and Japanese woodwind melodies with driving, up-tempo synth-pop percussion. This unconventional fusion of styles fit seamlessly into the ancient bio-technological, post-apocalyptic world of *Panzer Dragoon*, where it became a defining component of the game's atmosphere and identity.

Upon release, many magazines and critics specifically noted the game's excellent soundtrack, and in the years since *Panzer*'s release, the soundtrack has been available to buy in several formats, including CDs, digital downloads and even vinyl editions.

Azuma went on to create several game soundtracks, including the score for *Panzer Dragoon*'s sequel. He passed away in 2012 at the age of 64.

[Saturn] Bosses put up quite the fight, but it's oh so satisfying when you finally take them down.

Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within

MORE IS SOMETIMES LESS

RETROREVIVAL

» XBOX » 2004 » UBISOFT MONTREAL

With the remake of *Sands Of Time* being now officially cancelled, I've been spending a lot of time thinking about *Warrior Within*. I know it's considered an acclaimed game within the series, but it just never really clicked with me.

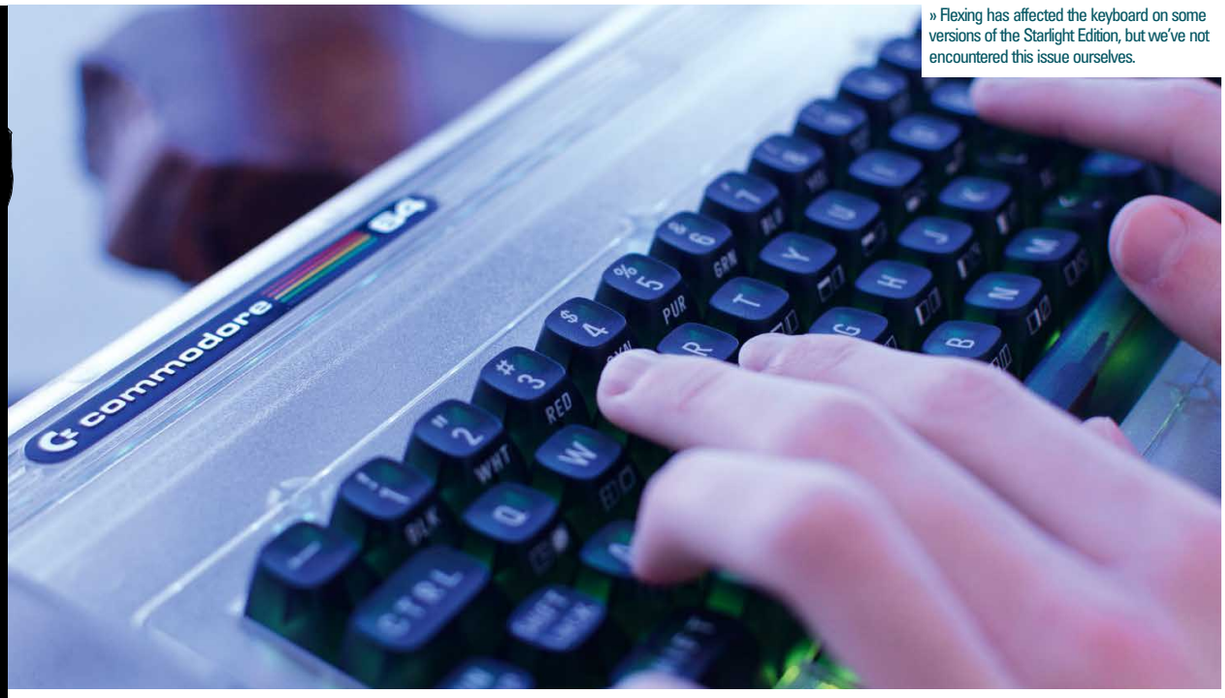
While *Sands Of Time* was criticised on release for its simplistic combat, I never had an issue with it because the exploration and story was always key to my enjoyment. I never liked the combat much in Jordan Mechner's original game, so basic, but functional combat was fine by me.

Having enjoyed *The Sands Of Time* so much, I paid close attention to any news that came out about its sequel, and I can still remember a preview that featured on the cover of *games™*. The interview promised that not only would the platforming be improved, but the combat would be greatly overhauled as well. While many seemed quite pleased about this change in direction, I began fearing the worst.

When review code came into the office my fears were realised, because there not only seemed to be a greater focus on fighting, but the whole tone of the game just felt darker – from its brooding colour palette, to a heavier soundtrack and a new, gruffer-sounding prince. Watching the reviewer play it was enough to convince me that this new *Prince Of Persia* wasn't for me, even when it ended up getting a very high score.

From the outside looking in it felt like a lot of the heart of *The Sands Of Time* was now missing and that was realised when I finally got to play it several years later. *Warrior Within* is not a bad game, far from it, it's just not the sort of adventure I wanted to see from the prince. I was clearly in the minority though as it was a big success for Ubisoft and led to a sequel. I should probably get around to playing that third game. I bet it runs great on my Steam Deck. ✱

>> This month sees Andrew Fisher getting to grips with a brand-new C64. Meanwhile, Darran tackles Rebellion's reboot of Speedball, plays Red Art Games' new Bomberman compilation and reads up on the history of Silent Hill



» Flexing has affected the keyboard on some versions of the Starlight Edition, but we've not encountered this issue ourselves.

Commodore 64 Ultimate: Starlight Edition

CHECKING OUT THE REVIVED COMMODORE 64

INFORMATION

- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** $349 (BASIC BEIGE), $399 (STARLIGHT EDITION – REVIEWED), $599 (FOUNDER'S EDITION)
- **PUBLISHER:** COMMODORE INTERNATIONAL
- **DEVELOPER:** COMMODORE
- **BUY IT FROM:** HTTPS://COMMODORE.NET

Nostalgia is clearly a driving force of this new system as Commodore's classic blue-and-white packaging is faithfully recreated with a slogan inside that reads "Welcome Back To The World Of Friendly Computing". As well as the machine itself the box incudes a 2.5m HDMI cable, a multi-region 12V power supply and The Very Second USB stick. This useful device contains games and demos to try, including the exclusives *Jupiter Fracture* and *Tiny Harvest*. It also includes the GEOS (Graphical Environment Operating System) productivity software.

The Ultimate itself comes in three forms. The Basic Beige model resembles the classic 'bread-bin' case, with orange function keys. The Founder's Edition, limited to 6,400 worldwide, has a golden case, golden keycaps and extra items, while the Starlight Edition reviewed here features a translucent case and keys and internal LED strips. These can react to the SID chip's output, giving a variety of lighting effects.

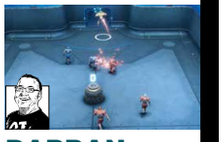
The motherboard is based on Gideon Zweijtzer's Ultimate64 replacement, using an FPGA to simulate the custom chips. Onboard memory allows up to 16MB or simulating Commodore's RAM Expansion Unit (REU). The main processor can be overclocked, allowing existing software to run faster or

» The Basic Beige model closely resembles the original 1982 model.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Commodore went bankrupt in 1994, but 31 years later, Perifractic (Christian Simpson) took over the trademarks in July 2025, and new products began shipping in November. Based on FPGA technology, modern features include HDMI and USB ports, Wi-Fi, Ethernet, and the Starlight Edition's LED lighting.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

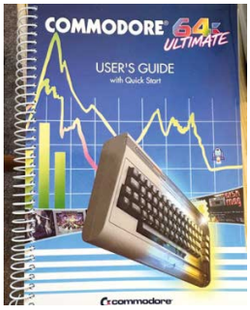
Speedball

It's clearly been made on a budget, but I've had tremendous fun with Rebellion's reboot and it's just as chaotic and bloodthirsty as the original.

TIM

Like a Dragon: Pirate Yakuza In Hawaii

This popped up on Game Pass not long after I finished *Infinite Wealth* and has Samoa Joe in it!



» The manual includes a Quick Start guide and the friendly robot TC64.

» The new ports replace the User Port (right); the audio jack is labelled RF, from the old mould.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
COMMODORE 64

▼ SOMETHING NEW
THEC64 MINI

Ultimate-specific software. The UltiSID emulation reproduces up to 8 SID chips, giving 24 channels of sound. Alternatively, two physical SID chips can be plugged in. The internal speaker optionally simulates drive sounds. There is a built-in player for SID and MOD music files.

DB9 joystick ports are found on the right-hand side, alongside the multi-function power switch. This switches the machine on, resets the computer, accesses the menus, and switches off. On the back are the familiar cartridge port, video output (for RGB/S-Video connection to a monitor/CRT with the correct cable) a serial IEC port and cassette port. This means you can easily attach existing Commodore joysticks, printers, disk drives and Datasettes. Physical cartridges can be plugged in, or the Ultimate can emulate devices such as the Action Replay. Sadly, the Ultimate does not ship with a joystick, although the new ArcadeR stick is available separately from Commodore, in four colour variations.

Replacing the User Port are the HDMI output, Ethernet port, and two USB-A ports (currently only for flash drives) – a User Port adapter can be purchased for devices that need it. HDMI displays allow you to add a subtle scanline effect, or to show the menu alongside the C64's display for convenience. The in-line audio jack (replacing the old RF jack) features optical output. The machine does come with Wi-Fi built in, allowing connections to Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) using the provided terminal software, plus FTP transfers and Telnet access via a PC. You can also connect to the new CommoServe file server.

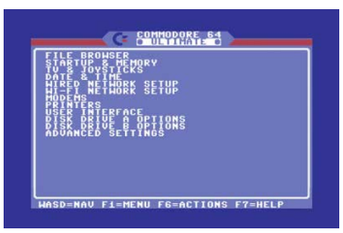
CommoServe hosts games, software, and plugins; this includes Commodore's first new game, *Jupiter Fracture*, which supports dual SID chips. The File Browser gives easy access to a USB drive or SD card (or an internal MicroSD card and USB device). The browser can handle disk, tape, and cartridge images, and can write back to real disks and tapes with the appropriate hardware. There was a real sense of nostalgia as we watched a game load from a tape image, complete with stripes. However, disk loading speeds are slow; a fastloader cartridge or JiffyDOS ROM certainly helps.

Early users have raised concerns. The multi-function power switch gets used constantly, but pressing the Commodore key and Restore brings up the menu, alleviating this. There has been 'flexing' of the keyboard on the Starlight Edition due to its thinner motherboard. We found that it took a lot of pressure, but routine typing was fine. Commodore is replacing units with severe flexing, and other models (including the Founders Edition) should not experience this. The LED lighting is fun when you play back music, while the ring-bound manual is a well-written update of the classic C64 User Guide. It's great to see online help forums and user groups already springing up. One clever upgrade is Christian Gleisner's plugin to stream/capture audio and video via the Ethernet connection.

From the moment you open the box, the C64 Ultimate transports you back to Commodore's heyday with added modern convenience. For long-term users, it will prove a sound investment to protect original machines. The keyboard looks and feels authentic, and from cartridges to joysticks, everything we tried just worked. The versatility and connectivity more than justify the price tag. ✱

In a nutshell

From its authentic look to its modern ports, the C64 Ultimate is a fan's dream, letting you experience every era of C64 software easily.



» The browser menu can be navigated with keys or a joystick.

» The Very Second USB stick, plugged in and working.

» [C64 Ultimate] *Jupiter Fracture* (top) is the sequel to Commodore's *Jupiter Lander*, while *Tiny Harvest* (bottom) sees you running a farm.

★ PICK OF THE MONTH

Super Bomberman Collection

WILL YOU HAVE A BLAST WITH KONAMI'S NEW COLLECTION?

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT:** PC
- **ALSO ON:** PLAYSTATION 5, SWITCH, SWITCH 2, XBOX SERIES S/X
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £29.99
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** RED ART GAMES
- **PLAYERS:** 1-5

★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
DYNA BLASTER (AMIGA)

▼ SOMETHING NEW
SUPER BOMBERMAN R (PC)

★ BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Bomberman* debuted in the UK under the name *Eric And The Floaters*. The series soon gained popularity during the Nineties as it shifted towards multiplayer-focussed play, while later years saw the series move to the third dimension with games like *Bomberman Hero*.

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Super Bomberman Collection

» There's currently an annoying sound issue on the Steam version where the audio lags. Fix it by turning off VSync.

» Quality-of-life options include a useful rewind feature and the ability to have three save slots for each available game.

Konami has made some excellent compilations recently, teaming up with the likes of M2 and Digital Eclipse to celebrate *Castlevania, Contra* and even the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. *Bomberman* is next up by developer Red Art Games, and while there's no denying its quality, it doesn't quite match the majesty of Konami's other recent compilations.

Super Bomberman Collection is a decidedly Nintendo-focussed compilation and contains all five SNES releases, as well as *Bomberman 1* and *II* for the original NES. While regional versions of many of the games are included, you won't find any of the PC Engine releases or the Mega Drive's *Mega Bomberman*, which feels like a missed opportunity.

Perhaps we've been spoiled by Digital Eclipse, but *Bomberman* feels perfect for a history-focussed Gold Masters Series and it would have been fantastic to see the likes of *Eric And The Floaters*, *Saturn Bomberman* and even the later N64-based games. Instead, we get a very small slice of *Bomberman*'s story and it's further diminished by the fact that the games are extremely similar to each other.

That's not to say you won't have fun with what's on offer, as the games play

» [PC] The two NES games are nice inclusions, but they're not a patch on the five core games.

» [PC] There are plenty of multiplayer variations across the main games. It's just a pity Remote Play is the only online option.

as well now as they did on release, delivering a good mix of action-focussed gameplay and chaotic multiplayer action. Things start off with *Super Bomberman* which has you bombing enemies and blocks to find power-ups and the hidden exit (which you won't be able to enter until all on-screen enemies are defeated). Complete enough of these stages and you'll encounter a boss before moving to the next world.

The remaining four games are all very similar, subtly altering the game mechanics by introducing new power-ups, vehicles, the kangaroo-like Louies, trapped allies and various other gameplay wrinkles. These subtle changes extend to each game's Battle Mode as well, which offers a variety of complexity and options with each subsequent game.

And it's these Battle Modes where Red Art Games has really dropped the ball. There are no proper online multiplayer options available, with only Remote Play as an option, which feels like a huge oversight. Multiplayer has always been the bread and butter of the series and while it still caters for couch play, we expect more from a compilation of this type in 2026.

» [PC] Once you've tackled each boss in Normal Mode, you can try the Boss Rush option.

» [PC] If you like the tunes of the *Super Bomberman* series you'll find plenty to enjoy here.

The decision to go down this simpler route and not include proper online options is frustrating, particularly as everything else about the compilation is generally very good. The emulation is of a high standard, there's a great gallery and music mode giving you access to lots of superb art and tunes from the series and the aforementioned NES *Bomberman* games are also a nice touch to have. There's even a fun Boss Rush mode to tackle. With a bit more variety in its games and some proper online options, this could have been an essential purchase. As it stands, it's just a good one. ★

In a nutshell

This could have been an excellent overview of the popular series, but it's a little too narrow in its focus and is massively hurt by having no proper online multiplayer options.

>> **Score 70%**

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★ PICK OF THE MONTH

Rayman: 30th Anniversary Collection

» **System:** PC (tested) PlayStation 5, Switch, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £17.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

Digital Eclipse is back with another love letter to a classic game franchise. This time it's Ubisoft's *Rayman* receiving the anniversary treatment and while it's narrow in its scope, there's still a huge amount of content to dive into.

Although it's not part of the developer's *Gold Masters Series*, there's still plenty to discover here. The main focus is the original game and a number of key versions of it are included. There's the hit PlayStation version, the Atari Jaguar edition, as well as the MS DOS version for PCs. The PC version is particularly good as it also includes *Rayman's New Levels*, *Rayman By His Fans* and *Rayman 60 Levels*, which amounts to 124 new stages from Ubisoft staff and fans of the series.

The PlayStation and PC versions have additional extras that range from changing the number of lives you start with, to even unlocking all levels, while all versions of the game come with rewind options, CRT and LCD filters and the usual quality-of-life extras like the ability to remap controls.

In a nice touch, the Game Boy Advance version (originally by Digital Eclipse) is also included, as well as the Game Boy Color edition of *Rayman*, which is essentially a brand-new game and full of interesting mechanics and clever ideas.

As well emulated and as enjoyable as the games are, it's the documentary side of the collection where things really shine. There's some genuinely fascinating information on offer here with great insight and interviews from the likes of Michel Ancel and other members of the *Rayman* team. There's even a playable demo of the SNES version that was originally planned. It all feels very comprehensive.

It's a shame that not every version of the original *Rayman* is here, but this remains a great tribute to one of the era's best-loved platformers.

» **Score 84%**

» [PC] Here's the Jaguar version, complete with an authentic CRT filter applied.

» [PC] The Game Boy Color version of *Rayman* is excellent and well worth playing.

Speedball

» **System:** PC (tested), PlayStation 5, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £24.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

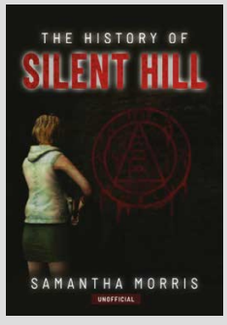
There's a lot to enjoy with Rebellion's *Speedball* reboot. While it feels quite low-budget in terms of its look and presentation, it manages to capture the brutal excitement of the earlier games. Couch play and online multiplayer are both available for those that want to take the fight to the masses and there are a good amount of challenging arenas to tackle. It's certainly light on game modes, but the included League option is fairly extensive, giving you a decent number of AI opponents to battle against. There are a good amount of customisation options and the multiplayer is as entertaining as ever, but we did find it took a while to get an online game going.

DARRAN JONES

» **Score 73%**

The History Of Silent Hill

» **Buy it for:** £29.99
» **Buy it from** pen-and-sword.co.uk



When it comes to survival horror, the development of the *Silent Hill* series is one of the most fascinating around. It's a real shame then that this new tome from Samantha Morris does very little to reveal it, as it's extremely light on new interviews. Each of the mainline games is broken down into specific parts including development, plot, characters, endings and enemies, and there's no denying that Morris knows her stuff. It's well-written and engaging and works best when it's offering deep dives into specific characters or themes. Sadly, when it comes to actual insight into the series' creation there's little here in the development sections that can't be found online, meaning hardcore fans will be well versed with what this book offers. This is certainly a good introduction to the series, but it will leave you wanting more.

DARRAN JONES

Earnest Evans Collection

» **System:** PC (tested), Switch, £34.99 » **Buy it for:** £15.99 (PC), £34.99 (Switch, PlayStation 5) » **Buy it from:** Online

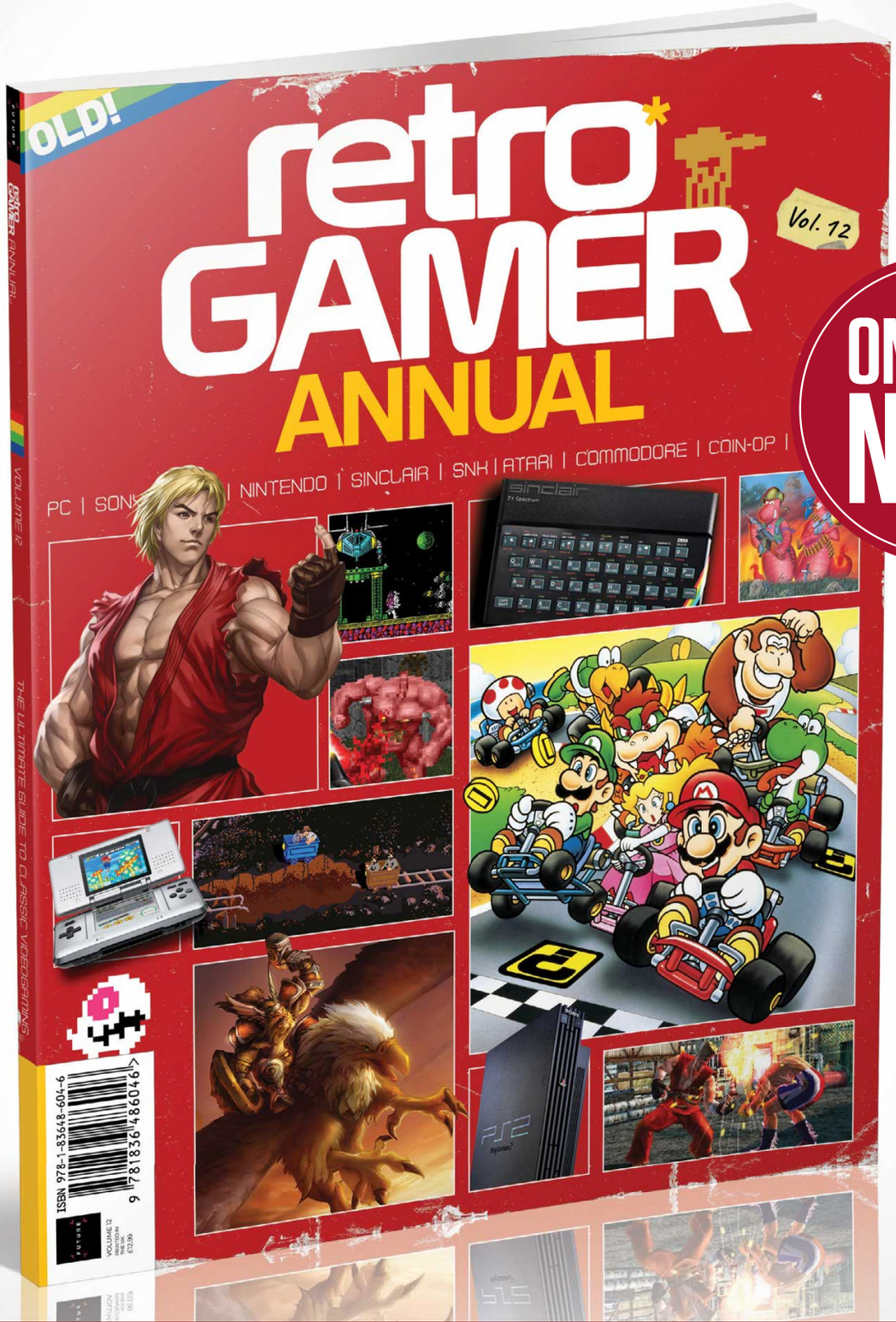
The latest collection from Limited Run Games is low on titles and extras, but is still worth investigating due to the rarity of its games. *Earnest Evans* is the weakest offering here, but remains a technically impressive platformer. *El Viento* is far more interesting, sharing run-and-gun elements and being a fast-paced action game with great visuals. That leaves *Annet Returns*, a Japanese-exclusive Mega-CD side-scrolling beat-'em-up that we've sunk a surprising amount of time into. It's hard to recommend the expensive console versions, due to the lack of notable extras (which are just art and music tracks) but the PC edition is good value at £15.99.

DARRAN JONES

» **Score 65%**

CELEBRATE THE BEST OF RETRO GAMING IN 2025

Our latest tome features an incredible amount of fantastic content from Retro Gamer's past 12 months. Iconic characters, huge franchises and classic systems all feature, making it an essential read for retro fans. Don't miss it!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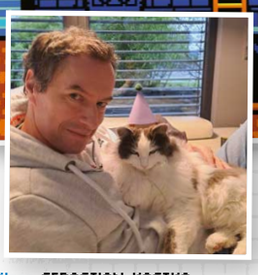
<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<!--- SEBASTIAN KOSTKA WITH HIS CAT MIKA (AKA BETA TESTER). --->

<!--- NINTENDO 64] THE ROPE ALLOWS BILLY TO ACCESS BOTH SIDES OF LEVEL 2. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

A LIVE DODO

<INTRO> THE RETRO-INSPIRED DONUT DODO WAS A HUGE HIT, AND CREATOR SEBASTIAN KOSTKA IS NOW CONVERTING THE GAME TO RETRO FORMATS </INTRO>

<INTRO> A LAST-MINUTE CHANGE OF PLANS SEES A DIFFERENT GAME IN OUR MAIN FEATURE, THE BRILLIANT DONUT DODO, WHICH IS NOW HEADING TO RETRO FORMATS. WE HAVE REVIEWS OF TWO GAMES HEADING TO KICKSTARTER AND ANOTHER THAT IS ONLY AVAILABLE ON A PHYSICAL MEGA DRIVE CARTRIDGE, DUE TO ITS SPECIAL SOUND CHIP. WE ALSO LOOK FORWARD TO ANOTHER MEGA DRIVE PROJECT AND FOLLOW THE PROGRESS OF OUR CHAMPION CODER'S ATARI 7800 GAMES. </INTRO>

<BODY> **Sebastian Kostka's creations are a love letter to Eighties arcades and *Donut Dodo* is no exception.** "I wanted to create my own take on the classic single-screen platformer, the kind of game you could imagine standing alongside arcade cabinets like *Pac-Man* or *Popeye*," we're told. "It's still my favourite era of gaming, and one I keep coming back to both as a player and a developer."

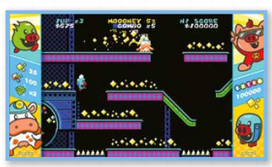
Donut Dodo itself inspired a wave of retro-arcade-style games on Steam (see Arcade Aspirations) and gained an Evercade release on the *Indie Heroes 3* cartridge. "Retro consoles feel like the legitimate home for games like this," continues Sebastian. "They open the door to proper physical releases including artwork and feelies, something that's largely been lost over time." So what does Sebastian like about older systems? "Working within the limits of older systems is a fascinating technical challenge," he explains. "It forces you to be more intentional with every decision and really focus on what matters in the design. *Donut Dodo* was rebuilt from the ground up using a custom C-based engine I've been developing specifically to target both modern systems and actual retro hardware. The idea from the start was that the game shouldn't know whether it's running on a current PC or on a console from the Nineties, aside from a few system-specific details like video, audio and input handling. I had to reimplement the game from scratch in plain C, which was a big undertaking but ultimately made the N64 version possible. That work has also laid the technical foundation for the sequel, *Donut Dodo Fantastico*. For N64-specific functionality, I

ARCADE ASPIRATIONS

<INTRO> MORE PC GAMES THAT APE THE ARCADES OF OLD </INTRO>

MURTOP

<Mixing *Dig Dug* with *Bomberman*, Murti The Rabbit defeats enemies by pooping out bombs. Original creator Huilit is converting it to NES. />



CASH COW

<In *Donut Dodo*'s follow-up, our bovine hero grabs the crystals and diamonds to rack up combos while dodging enemies. />

HOPPY HOP

<Another rabbit stars in this *Q*Bert*-inspired title, changing the floor tiles by hopping on them and dodging a shotgun-wielding fox. />

GALACTICON

<Mixing both *Joust* and *Defender*, you must rescue the prisoners and place them in rescue pods before heading on to the next planet. />

ANNALYNN

<Grab rubies to make the snakes vulnerable and clear all the coins to complete each themed level in this cute platformer. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [NINTENDO 64] THIS ROTATING FAIRGROUND WHEEL IS THE MAJOR FEATURE OF LEVEL 3. --->

<!--- [NINTENDO 64] THIS VERSION HAS NEW OFFLINE ACHIEVEMENTS YOU CAN EARN. --->

<!--- [PC] A SNEAK PREVIEW OF DODO DONUT FANTASTICO. --->

<!--- [NES] WE HOPE TO BRING YOU MORE ON THE CONVERSION OF MURTOP IN A FUTURE ISSUE. --->

used the open-source libdragon development library, which provides low-level access to the hardware and integrates nicely with my engine."

A *Donut Dodo* cartridge is on Sebastian's mind. "I'd like to offer a digital download and a special physical release. An authentic cartridge feels like the right way to present a game like this, but N64 carts are expensive to produce. The current plan is to gauge demand first, likely through a Kickstarter campaign, to make sure a physical run is viable and done properly."

The N64 won't be the only console getting a conversion. "A Dreamcast port is currently in the works," confirms Sebastian. "I started with the N64 as it has tighter hardware constraints, and I wanted to see if the game and engine could work comfortably within those limits. Beyond that, I'd love to explore something like the Mega Drive, but those are very different challenges, so it's one system at a time."

Could we see more of Sebastian's Pixel Games (pixel.games) titles reaching retro systems? "I like the idea of treating the PC versions as the 'arcade originals' with retro consoles getting their own 'home conversions' as a fun throwback to the Eighties and Nineties and it's something I'd love to push further." We'll certainly be inserting coins to play them all. </BODY>

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> NOW ORGANISED BY FORMAT, HERE ARE THE LATEST NEWS BYTES TO ENJOY </INTRO>

Amiga: Dave18's excellent *Renegade* conversion is released for the AGA, with an ECS beta also available. Get pummelling by visiting bit.ly/renegade-aga

Amstrad CPC: Typhonsoft's *Reginald And The She Vampires* is a remake of 1987's *Mr Weems And The She Vampires*. Stake it out at bit.ly/reginald-cpc

Atari STE: *Puckman* is a great conversion of the Namco classic, requiring 1MB of memory. You'll find it at bit.ly/puckman-ste

Atari 8-bit: *The New Years Disk 2026* includes Wrathchild's brilliant conversion of *3D Monster Maze*. Discover it at bit.ly/ny2026-atari

C64: *Bubble Bobble Lost Cave* recreates the arcade mod's 100 new levels, based on Davide Bottino's recent *Bubble Bobble Remastered*. You'll find it at bit.ly/lostcave-c64

Game Boy Color: *Yap And The Enchanted Bubbles* is based on *Pang*. €9.99 gets you a digital download, while Homebrew Factory will produce the cartridge. The first 100 preorders get a collector's pin badge. There's more info at bit.ly/yap-gbc

Mega Drive: *Bailey The Brave* (above) sees you taking control of a sheepdog herding sheep and protecting them from UFO abduction. It's a free download at digitalmints.com

Plus/4: Check out the superb *Ghosts 'N Goblins Arcade*, which is at bit.ly/gng-plus4

Saturn: *Vigilant Paradise* from Playnautic ($10 download) is a clever first-person shooter with two playable characters. You'll find it at bit.ly/vigilant-saturn

Spectrum Next: Mike Dailly has created an enhanced version of *Mercenary* for the Next. Fly on over to bit.ly/mercenary-next

ZX Spectrum: *Go-Go Bunnygun* is a brilliant horizontally scrolling shooter from Ionian Games. Get blasting at bit.ly/gogobunny

Various: Inufuto's latest, *Awass*, lets you move ladders to reach the flags. Head on over to bit.ly/awass-inufuto for more information.

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CHAMPION CODER

LAURENT (ECDHE)

<INTRO> A RECENT CONVERT TO THE 7800, LAURENT HAS THREE GAMES IN DEVELOPMENT RIGHT NOW </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: MASSACHUSETTS, UNITED STATES WEBSITE: ECDHE.ITCH.IO FORMAT: ATARI 7800 WORKING ON: SHOTGUN, ROGUE7800, GALACTIC DRAGON INVADERS />

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN PROGRAMMING THE 7800, LAURENT?

<It's a very powerful system. It has a very peculiar way of handling graphics, but once you understand how it works, you can achieve impressive things that the NES or the Master System could only dream of! />

<!--- LAURENT WANTS TO CREATE A SATIRICAL, ULTIMA-STYLE RPG THAT MAKES FUN OF RPG CLICHÉS. --->

WHAT IS YOUR DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT LIKE?

<I develop in C using cc7800, Gimp for graphics, and a7800 for the emulator/debugger. I've written in assembly before, but it's sometimes hard to understand your own code a month later. cc7800 provides the option to either insert assembly or modify the C code for parts of the game that need to run faster. />

HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO CONVERT THE MULTIPLAYER GAME SHOTGUN?

<I loved the gameplay. The first version I wrote was for the GameTank, a homebrew console released in 2024. I decided to port it to 7800 to learn that console.

Getting a decent AI without slowing down the game was tough, as it needs to control up to three CPU players. Thankfully, a couple of people on AtariAge were kind enough to test on the QuadTari hardware [for four players]. I would have liked to add a musical score but was not able to get something I liked, so I decided to declare it complete so that I can focus on *Rogue7800*. />

WHAT INSPIRED ROGUE7800?

<I wanted to bring a different type of game to the 7800. Someone suggested a Roguelike. The challenge was to come up with random mazes in limited RAM. I decided to program the graphics chip, known as the DLL (Display List List), directly. It allowed me to easily add effects, such as shaking the screen when you take a hit. />

ARE YOU ADDING ANYTHING TO THE BASIC GAMEPLAY?

<I want to add a couple more items to give more choices. I also want to change how magical items are found. I will add sound and music and complete it sometime in 2026. />

<!--- [ATARI 7800] LAURENT WILL LOOK FOR A PUBLISHER TO CREATE A PHYSICAL RELEASE OF ROGUE7800. --->

<!--- [ATARI 7800] GRAB A GUN AND SHOOT YOUR OPPONENTS IN SHOTGUN, CONVERTED FROM THE C64 ORIGINAL BY DR WURO INDUSTRIES. --->

DATA BURST

DEATH & LEAD

RETRO GAMER SIZZLER

<INFO FORMAT: MEGA DRIVE/GENESIS CREDITS: KAI MAGAZINE SOFTWARE PRICE: PHYSICAL EDITION €64.90 PLUS SHIPPING WEB: BIT.LY/DEATHLEAD-MD />

<BODY> **In 1873 America, General Lucius – the Black Diablo – has gone rogue, terrorising local towns.** Two brave heroes fight back: Miguel, whose sister has been kidnapped, and Ryker, who was tortured and left for dead. Each of the game's levels is split into two stages. First comes the forced-scrolling section, where you shoot into the screen and dodge bullets coming towards you (think *Wild Guns* or *Cabal*/*Blood Bros*). Barrels can be shot to reveal power-ups like TNT and health bottles, and throwing TNT charges cause more damage to enemies.

In the second part of each level, players walk and jump through the scrolling level, punching nearby baddies and crouching to avoid bullets (similar to games like *Rolling Thunder*). Waiting at the end of each stage is a tough boss who must be defeated to continue. The better your aim (accuracy), the more health you recover for the next stage. There's support for 3-button and 6-button pads, with the latter giving separate buttons for punch and crouch.

Superb graphics in the intro are accompanied by speech and outstanding music reminiscent of a spaghetti Western (thanks to the cartridge's enhanced sound chip). Music, speech and graphics throughout are also excellent. *Death & Lead* features three difficulty levels and up to four continues are available (which you'll need, as this is one tough game). It would have been nice to have more scenery to destroy, but this is a very polished and playable release and a must for any Mega Drive fan. </BODY>

SCORE: 90%

<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] MIGUEL AND RYKER FIGHT THEIR WAY THROUGH THE FIRST LEVEL. --->

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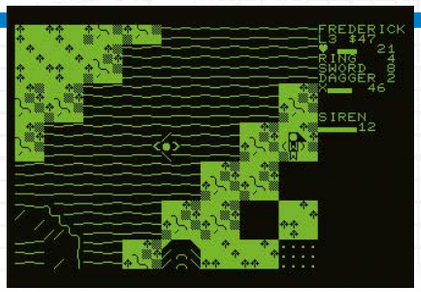
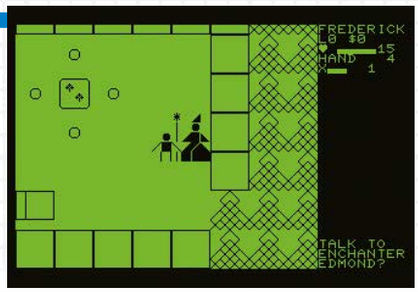


<!--- [PET] ROW YOUR BOAT DOWN THE STREAM, BUT WATCH OUT FOR THE DEADLY SIREN!. --->



<!--- [PET] EDMOND THE ENCHANTER IS FOUND IN A VILLAGE; HE WILL ENCHANT YOUR WEAPONS AT A PRICE. --->

TOWER & DRAGON

<INFO FORMAT: PET (40 COLUMNS, 8K MEMORY, TAPE OR DISK) CREDITS: JASON COOK (DESIGN, CODING), STEPHEN BAKER (TITLE MUSIC) PRICE: KICKSTARTER FOR PHYSICAL VERSION / FREE ONLINE VERSION TO FOLLOW WEB: BIT.LY/TOWERANDDRAGON / TOWERANDDRAGON.COM />

<BODY> **Designed to run on any PET, this RPG sees Frederick The Knight attempt to save his kingdom.** Frederick can be controlled by either the keyboard or a SNES joypad with an adapter. Enemies can be attacked when adjacent, gold is collected automatically, and the Fog Of War is removed as you explore, filling in your map. As you gain experience, your weapon, armour and hit points will be levelled up. Talking to NPCs reveals the plot and extra quests, and later, you can wield enchanted weapons and learn useful spells. Progress can be saved at campsites and zone entrances, where you can access any zone already visited. With a completion time of eight hours, this is hugely impressive, thanks to its clever PETSCII graphics. </BODY>

SCORE: 85%

<!--- [NES] THIS EARLY MONSTER IS NO PUSHOVER. --->

<!--- [NES] KYRA WILL NEED TO FIND THE HOVER ABILITY TO EXPLORE THAT UPPER PLATFORM.. --->

AETHOS

<INFO FORMAT: NES CREDITS: DARKBITS (DEVELOPER), BROKE STUDIO (PUBLISHER) PRICE: $10 (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) / €50 (PHYSICAL CARTRIDGE) WEB: BIT.LY/DATAMAN-NES / BIT.LY/DATAMAN-CART />

<BODY> **Winner of Best Music in the Byte Off V competition, AI explorer Kyra sets out to investigate if planet Aethos will be suitable for human life – but energy surges shut down her ship Elysium.** This distinctive Metroidvania requires Kyra to explore four sectors of the planet, upgrade her abilities (including a shield and freeze shot), beat bosses, and finally defeat Zyrak, whose Nyzari race wants to dominate the planet. With good graphics and cutscenes, excellent music, and plenty of depth, this is an excellent NES title that's heading to Kickstarter. </BODY>

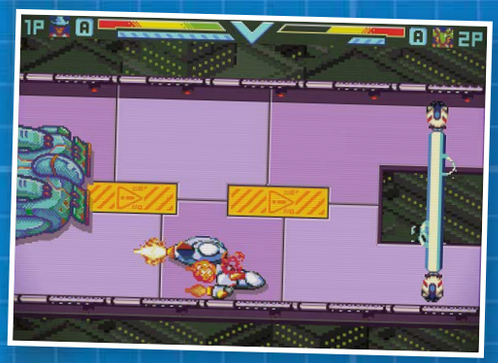
SCORE: 88%

PROCESSING

<INTRO> THE GONESBREW TEAM FROM LYON, FRANCE, ARE WORKING ON THE HIGH-SPEED MEGA DRIVE GAME VECTOR F – BIT.LY/VECTORF-MD </INTRO>

<BODY> **Designer Rahzelk credits *Sonic*'s Green Hill Zone as inspiration for *Vector F*.** "I wanted to create a game where that rush never stops — the pure, exhilarating speed you find in chase sequences in *Aero Blasters*, *Battletoads*, or *Alien Storm*. I wanted something perfect for quick sessions and tournament play, at home or at retro-gaming events. The 'death race' idea blended with influences from movies like *The Running Man* and *Rollerblade*." Power-ups and special moves provide opportunities, with each race having only one survivor.

Created with Stephane Dallongeville's SGDK, physical cartridges are being planned. "The digital version will be free and accessible to everyone. Depending on interest, we might consider crowdfunding to produce more cartridges and add extra content (ships, levels, new game modes)." After a change of pixel artist, the project is picking up speed. "*Vector F* will focus on fun and depth, just like arcade games of the era, rather than on sheer quantity of vehicles or tracks," says rahzelk. "2026 should bring to life, for all of us, a childhood dream." </BODY>



<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] MEHDI AND CYCLOPODE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR GRAPHIC DESIGN, WHILE THE CYBERDEOUS TEAM COMPOSED THE SOUNDTRACK. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

KRAZY FOR KRATOS

Darran and Tim reminisce about the God Of War series

DARRAN JONES

TIM EMPEY

***God Of War* is one of Sony's most acclaimed franchises, delivering hyper-kinetic action and astonishing, cinematic visuals.** With an evolution of the series gracing our cover, Tim and Darran felt it was time to have a gab about videogaming's angriest protagonist.

DARRAN

What's your first memory of *God Of War*, Tim?

TIM

The first I heard and saw of *God Of War* was someone playing it in the games room at Highbury. Seriously, that was the first time, I hadn't see any previews or anything. So what I saw was Kratos hanging from a ceiling swiping at stuff. And it didn't look that good. But then it got an unusually high score in *games™* and everyone was raving about it. So I picked it up myself. You were on *games™* at the time, so you must have been well prepped for it.

DARRAN

Oh yes. We did a preview/cover and I remember being blown away by the Hydra battle near the opening of the game. It was incredibly cinematic and exciting to watch.

TIM

Once I got playing it I was very impressed. You know that feeling when you're playing something that's very, very good? I had that for most of the playtime. And I'm pretty sure I played it on harder difficulties to unlock some silly costumes.

DARRAN

If I'm honest, one of the things that really excited me was when you are running through the city and Ares is wreaking havoc in the background. Anyway, you could go inside every house. Granted, they were simple rooms, but it just made everything feel that little more grounded. I loved sticking my blades in the mouths of Minotaurs as well. Did you have a particularly messy kill you liked to use, Tim?

TIM

Not off the top of my head, but I didn't feel much guilt when you have to set that guy in a cage on fire while he pleaded for his life. Ha! But I did feel a whole lot of frustration trying to climb out of the Underworld on that spiky revolving thing. And the buzzsaws. I'm so glad there wasn't any of that in the sequel.

DARRAN

Oh man, that sodding pole you had to climb. That was frustrating as hell. Speaking of the sequel. Did you also think it was bloody brilliant? (Emphasis on the bloody.)

TIM

I was really lucky and got to review *God Of War II* for *Play*. I may even have gone home to play it during the day, which was pretty unheard of at the time. I had a bit of a panic when the second disc wouldn't load, but the PR person sent out another disc very quickly. I think it was a six-page review, so I really had to play it to completion. And I'm so glad I did because the sequel improved on everything.

» [PSP] Kratos has popped up in a number of one-on-one fighting games, including *Soulcalibur: Broken Destiny*.

DARRAN

I remember scoffing when it got 10/10 in *games™*, and thinking that it had been massively overscored. When I finally got around to playing it, I could see why it scored so highly. It's still probably a nine for me, but there's no denying it's a staggeringly good sequel that builds on everything that made the original so good, while taking out the few bits that didn't work. I think it's the sheer scale of the game that really impressed me. What about you, Tim?

TIM

Yes, the sense of scale was amazing, scrabbling around on a Titan was pretty mind-blowing for me at the time. I'd really like

» [PlayStation 3] *God Of War: Ascension* was completely forgettable. Darran can't remember anything about it.

» [PlayStation 4] Darran loved the 2018 reboot so much he's considering getting the PC version so he can play it on the go.

» [PSP] Kratos playing his own, quite literal, version of The Floor Is Lava. You have to wonder how his sandals survive.

to play it again. Or… any of the other ones, because aside from writing a preview for one of the PSP games, *God Of War II* was the last of the series that I actually played. Absolutely shocking, I know.

DARRAN

That is shocking. Particularly when you consider how much you liked the second game. Funnily enough I played them all a couple of years ago and they hold up very well. Were you not tempted to play *God Of War III* at all?

TIM

Of course I was! But I didn't have a PS3! So, and I hang my head with a bit of shame here, I watched a playthrough on YouTube. That's the only game I've ever done that for. But, blimey, the violence is ramped all the way up in *III*. There were some cutscenes that had me genuinely wincing.

DARRAN

I have to admit, *God Of War III* didn't do all that much for me. I found it a bit too needlessly gory and the framerate was quite erratic at times. I did thoroughly enjoy the PSP games though. I played through them on release and later the PS3 remasters. They do a good job of miniaturising the action but still making everything feel epic. I suppose we should talk about the sex minigames. What did you think of them?

TIM

They gave me red orbs! (Not a euphemism.)

» [PlayStation 3] If you thought the previous *God Of War*s were bloody, wait until you play the third instalment.

> "The sense of scale was amazing, scrabbling around on a Titan was pretty mind-blowing for me at the time"
>
> **TIM EMPEY**

DARRAN

I probably laughed at the time, but I found them rather childish when I played them again a few years back. Let's quickly finish off by saying that you really need to play the 2018 *God Of War* because it's a gloriously good reboot and is probably my favourite game in the series.

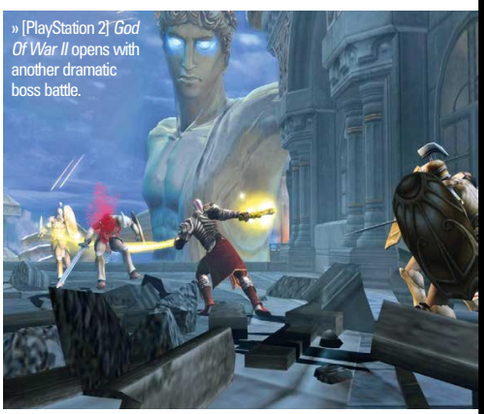
TIM

I will at some point. The stars just need to align, or something.

DARRAN

Good man. *

» [PlayStation 2] *God Of War* kicks off with a fantastic, epic fight against a Hydra and the action rarely flags from there.



» [PlayStation 2] *God Of War II* opens with another dramatic boss battle.

» [PSP] Despite the small screen, the PSP *God Of War* games still feel suitably epic.

READERS REACT

Sharing your favourite God Of War games

Ing.D3VK
I discovered the PlayStation 2 thanks to *God Of War II*.

Robert August de Meijer
All of them are stupidly bad, but 2018 at times sort of has engaging combat and is 'only' three times as long as it should be.

Noe V
Ghost Of Sparta on the PS3. It felt like Ready At Dawn finished the journey that Santa Monica Studio wanted to tell in the first two games. The atmosphere was on another level even if you didn't take advantage of the 3D screen support. It was the perfect classic *GOW* experience.

enderbrace
I was never a big fan of the series until the PS4/5 games, which are great, so it's *Ragnarök* for me.

Michael Galligan
Chains Of Olympus on the PSP. I've not really played much of the home-console versions of *God Of War*, but I loved that one and played it to death. I mean, you can dress Kratos as a potato, what's not to love?

FatPlumber
I loved the original PS2 version. Ploughing through all kinds of gods, creatures, temples and even the Underworld from Greek myth, that opening level on the ships in the Aegean Sea and finally taking down Ares was a rush from start to finish. Also a big shout out to the excellent PSP versions too.

Jason
The first one. It set the template for the original set of games. Gory, exciting and full of exciting setpieces. And Kratos taught me all about revenge.

Randy M
God Of War III. It's easily the most epic of the trilogy, and where Kratos regained some of his humanity through Pandora before finally taking down Zeus. I always thought it was a great finale to his story while having the most brutal and fluid gameplay.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

NINTENDO 3DS XL SUPER NINTENDO EDITION

"As a retro gamer, I thought this was a cool model when it came out. I never expected it to become so sought-after. The box alone is worth more than what I paid for it originally."

AMOUNT PAID: €150

GOTCHA FORCE

"I bought it online and thought it was overpriced when I got it about 15 years ago. Since then, its value has skyrocketed, and it's one of the most valuable GameCube games nowadays."

AMOUNT PAID: €80

WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

We speak to Kieran Ryan about his eclectic collection of consoles and handhelds

Words by Faith Johnson

BIO

NAME:
Kieran Ryan

LOCATION:
Galway, Ireland

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
€25,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
GameCube

FAVOURITE GAME:
Tetris

Kieran Ryan has a broad range of computers, consoles, and handhelds and is in this month's collector hot seat. We start by asking Kieran how he first discovered gaming and his fondest memories of those early years. "It was playing games like *Bounty Bob* and *Jet Set Willy* on my friend's rubber-keyed Spectrum 48K," he begins. "There would have been five or six of us crowded around the computer, trying to put each other off so our turn would come around faster. No one had a joystick, so it was keyboard controls all around. I thought it was the best thing ever, and I soon got the 48K plus model before eventually graduating to the 128K."

So why did Kieran decide to start collecting retro games once he became an adult? "I wouldn't say I ever started collecting retro games; I just started collecting games that became retro," he explains. "I still have most of my old Spectrum collection, including magazine covercassettes. I rarely trade in any of my games, so I've accumulated quite a lot over the years. I love discovering games that I might have had for years but never got around to trying. I've been playing a lot of lightgun games recently, for example. Rarity and condition don't bother me, but I'm always on the lookout for bargains. I like JRPGs and will also take a second look at collector's editions. I've been slowly adding to my GameCube and PSP collections over the years, so they're probably a priority for me, along with anything odd or with novelty value. For some strange reason, I love my Ouya."

We ask Kieran about the best bargain he has had. "It's probably my big box *Super Metroid*," he tells us. "While living in Cork, I came across a stack of them, still sealed, in a second-hand book shop. I think I paid €10 for mine. I bought one and went home chuffed. That night it dawned on me that I should have bought them all, but when I went back the next day, they were gone. So, I got a bargain but missed out on making a small fortune."

Kieran enjoys collecting handhelds, and we ask him what his favourites are. "That's a tough question. For quirkiness and novelty value, I love the micro handhelds like the Game Boy Micro and the Game Gear Micro. I recently got a Thumby Color, which is outrageously small, although they're too small to play comfortably. Although obviously Nintendo made some amazing handhelds, I prefer the PSP and the Vita. I would have to say the PSP Go is my favourite of all time. Such an underrated console, years ahead of its time. I still play it and love the design and the fact that it is so light."

We finish by asking where Kieran sees his collection going in the future and what his Grail item to add would be. "I would love to get a Virtual Boy. I've never played one, but from what I've heard, they're dreadful. My Grail item is a working Sam Coupé. They were supposed to be the next-gen Speccy, but just never caught on. They rarely come up for sale nowadays, unfortunately." *

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

SUPER METROID
"I was lucky to find this in a second-hand book shop."
AMOUNT PAID: €10

PERSONA 3 PORTABLE
"I got this Special Edition new from a gaming site in Canada. I love the *Persona* and *Shin Megami Tensei* series and spent many happy hours completing this game."
AMOUNT PAID: €80

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

LAST NINJA 2: BACK WITH A VENGEANCE

■ "I've had this since new and have great memories of it. I played it to death and knew every inch of every level. The highlight of my childhood was having a map of the game I hand-drew, featured in the cheats page of *Your Sinclair*."

PAID: ABOUT €20.

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

GOD OF WAR (PLAYSTATION 2)

Used condition copies of Kratos' first quest can be picked up for under **£15,** while good condition ones can fetch over **£20.** Platinum versions can be bought for under **£10.**

CRYSTAL KINGDOM DIZZY (ZX SPECTRUM)

These don't come up very often and usually sell for over **£25** depending on the condition and completeness.

DEAD RISING (XBOX 360)

You won't have to raise lots of funds, as used versions of Capcom's game cost under **£5** and good ones for under **£10.**

R-TYPE III: THE THIRD LIGHTNING (SNES)

Good condition, complete PAL copies are rare and typically fetch around **£400.** Used carts can be bought for around **£25.**

PANZER DRAGOON (SATURN)

One of the more easily found Saturn titles. Good condition complete copies cost under **£15** and mint copies around **£30.**

DARK CASTLE (MAC)

This will set you back **£30** if you're fine with just the disk, and at least **£50** for a complete copy.

ROBOCOP (GAME BOY)

There are plenty of loose carts to buy for **£10,** while boxed and complete versions start at **£25** and increase depending on condition.

ROCKET: ROBOT ON WHEELS (NINTENDO 64)

Loose PAL carts can be picked up for under **£50,** but complete copies start at **£80** and can go over **£100.** The US version is even more expensive, as Darran recently discovered.

PENGO (GAME GEAR)

This is actually quite a hard game to find complete and often commands over **£40** as a result. Loose carts are a lot more plentiful and start at **£5** but can go as high as **£20.**

HOW MUCH?!

AMAZING TATER

Your wallet would feel like it had been mashed and roasted after purchasing this mint copy of *Amazing Tater* on the Game Boy for over **£3,000.**

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

A MUTANT IN THE MAIL

Martyn Carroll's collection of Mat Smith memorabilia just acquired a golden egg

Last Christmas I received three pairs of black socks, a Lynx Africa gift set and the inlay for the unreleased ZX Spectrum game *Attack Of The Mutant Zombie Flesh Eating Chickens From Mars.* The first two things were expected; the third very much wasn't. Before I explain how this inlay came my way, I need to quickly share the story behind it. The game (hereafter referred to as *Mutant Chickens*), was in development at Software Projects around 1986/7, and was initially based on the *Road Runner* cartoon before licensing woes saw it reworked as an original title. The game was being developed by my programming hero Matthew Smith and would be his first game since *Jet Set Willy*, his long-awaited comeback. But Mat being Mat… well.

Programmer John Darnell occupied the office next to Mat at Software Projects, working on an offshoot title for the Commodore 64 that was eventually released as *Star Paws*. He explained what happened to *Mutant Chickens* for a feature that appeared in **RG** 91. "Not much code was written," he told me back then. "All that ever got to the screen was a dog-type character running along. Basically, Matthew lost interest. After *Jet Set Willy* he was proving extremely difficult to motivate. The cassette inlay was produced as a means of putting pressure on him to produce something. It didn't work. If there had been a finished game, with Matthew's name, and his genius, it would have sold squillions." To put more pressure on Mat, the game was heavily advertised in the games mags too.

When *Mutant Chickens* was inevitably cancelled, the superfluous inlays were presumably binned – but at least two survived. One was discovered in the early Noughties by *Retrogamer* fanzine editor Keith Ainsworth, who chanced upon the inlay in a Merseyside charity shop, buried inside a box of old computer tapes. There was no game with it – because there *was no* game – but it was still amazing to find something like that in the wild.

> "I received a padded envelope in the post containing the inlay"

The second was in the personal collection of John Darnell. John told me he'd taken an inlay as a keepsake, and it was now one of his most prized possessions. At the time, John had left the UK to become a pastor of a church in Canberra, Australia, and we kept in touch over the years. I later interviewed him about the making of Mastertronic's *Kane* games (for **RG** 107), and he would often update me on his efforts at finishing *Sleepwalker*, a C64 project that stalled when he was at Software Projects.

Fast forward to last December and he sent me an email, out of the blue. "Martyn, I am disposing of all my stuff from my 8-bit days," he wrote. "Are you interested in the *Mutant Chickens* inlay? If you are still alive?" Yes I am. And yes I am. "Give me your address. I'll send it." A couple of days before Christmas I received a padded envelope in the post containing the inlay. It's a double-cassette-sized inlay and the main cover features the game's gobstopper of the title brought to life with cartoon characters. The illustration on the rear shows the game's canine hero, Zappo The Dog, surrounded by weird aliens on the surface of Mars. It's clear it's no dummy insert – this is indeed the inlay designed to go with the finished game. It even opens up to reveal the game's scenarios in different languages. In a lovely touch John also enclosed a Christmas card from his family to mine. I immediately emailed to thank him and ask if he'd like me to reimburse the postage, or make a charitable donation on his behalf. No reply. It seems he's moved on, leaving his 8-bit days behind.

So one of John's prized possessions is now one of mine. It will go on a shelf, gathering dust – which is both a comment on my office cleaning routine and my habit of squirrelling away shiny things. But I'm not really a retro collector and I don't covet things. In the past I've donated some bits I've acquired to retro museums, including a Spectrum signed by Mat Smith and the first issue of *CVG* magazine signed by editor Terry Pratt. I should do the same with the *Mutant Chickens* inlay. It's a cool curio that should be seen. Unlike John, I have no personal connection to it, so the decision is easier. But his actions do prompt the question: does there come a time in life when we should let the material stuff go and move on? I'm sure Mr Smith would agree with that. ✱

PRIZED POSSESSIONS

THE RETRO STUFF I WOULD STRUGGLE TO PART WAYS WITH

SIGNED BIT AND BOBS

Friend and fellow **RG** freelancer Paul Drury has gifted me loads of signed items over the years, including a *Battlezone* flyer signed by Ed Rotberg and a signed Scott Adams photo.

MY ORIGINAL GAME BOY

This is the only original hardware that I still own from my childhood. It's still boxed and complete with the *Tetris* pack-in.

ULTIMATE, THE COLLECTED WORKS

I love Ultimate and have all its Spectrum games. Many are the original copies I owned back when Ultimate ruled.

DARK SIDE MAGAZINE, ISSUE 74

This issue of the genre mag, published in August 1998, features my first proper article in print. It was about (surprise!) old computer games.

RETRO GAMER MAGAZINE, ISSUE 19

A folder containing proof pages of the issue that went unpublished when Live Publishing folded. A turning point for me – and the magazine.

FULL-PAGE ADS FOR MUTANT CHICKENS APPEARED IN THE GAMING PRESS, WITH MAT'S NAME PROMINENTLY DISPLAYED
ONLY £5.95 FOR YOUR SPECTRUM
ATTACK of the MUTANT ZOMBIE FLESH EATING chickens From MARS
Starring ZAPPO the DOG
New From
SOFTWARE PROJECTS
AVAILABLE FROM ALL GOOD COMPUTER RETAIL OUTLETS
HERE'S THE FULL INLAY. IT'S NOT CLEAR WHO CREATED THE ARTWORK, EXCEPT IT'S CONFIRMED THAT IT WASN'T REGULAR SOFTWARE PROJECTS ILLUSTRATOR ROGER TISSYMAN.
ATTACK OF THE MUTANT ZOMBIE FLESH EATING CHICKENS FROM MARS
SPECTRUM
ZAPPO THE DOG
THE CASE EVEN FEATURES THE BARCODE, WHICH USES THE SHORTENED ZAPPO THE DOG TITLE.

RETRO TREASURE

Readers reveal their most prized possessions

FRANK GASKING'S BRILLIANT GAMES THAT WEREN'T BOOK FEATURES A MOCK-UP SCREEN OF WHAT THE GAME MAY HAVE LOOKED LIKE.
MY ORIGINAL DMG GAME BOY, BROUGHT FOR ME WHEN I WAS 13. IT'S BEATEN UP BUT STILL WORKS, OF COURSE IT'S BULLET-PROOF.
I HAVE A FEW HUNDRED SPECTRUM GAMES, BUT THE ULTIMATE TITLES ARE MY MOST TREASURED. THAT ARTWORK!
YOU'VE GOT GRAIL. THE MUTANT CHICKENS INLAY IS RECEIVED, THANKS TO THE GENEROSITY OF JOHN DARNELL.
ACHIEVEMENT UNLOCKED! MAT SMITH READING MY MAKING OF JET SET WILLY ARTICLE IN RG 150.
THERE WAS NO ACTUAL GAME, BUT MAT'S FRIEND STEVE LEYLAND DID CONTRIBUTE A LOADING SCREEN.
JUST SOME OF THE SIGNED STUFF THAT PAUL DRURY HAS SENT ME FOR RETRO SERVICES RENDERED (SCREENSHOT GRABBING, MAINLY).
ATTACK of the MUTANT ZOMBIE flesh eating CHICKENS from MARS
SOFTWARE PROJECTS
BATTLEZONE
ATARI

Davey Sloan
It has to be the specially commissioned *ToeJam & Earl* original artwork that my wife got me for my 40th birthday. It's signed by *TJ&E* artist Nathan Shorts and designer Greg Johnson. Jammin'.

Dan Whitehead
The original Spectrum that Phil South used when he worked on *Your Sinclair*.

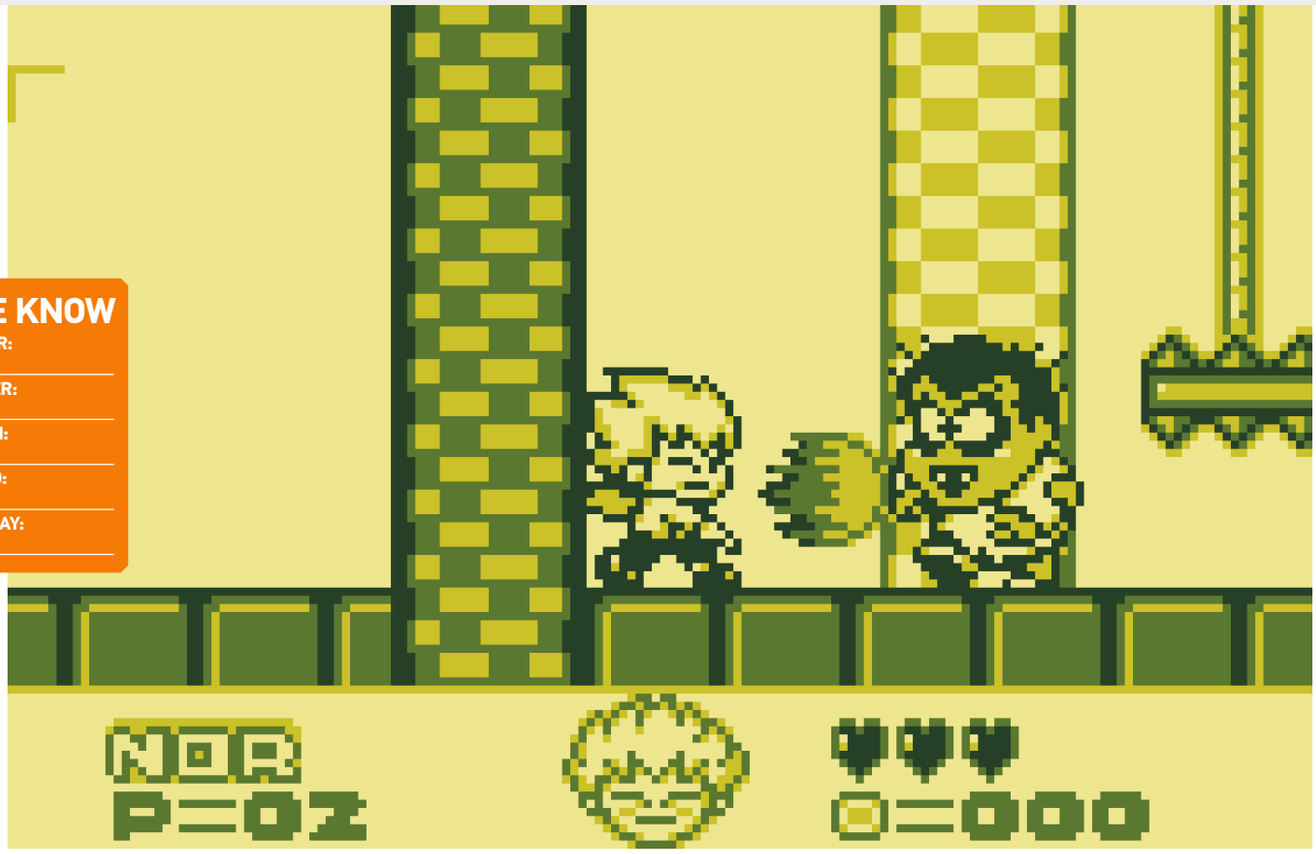
Rhys Wynne
I have an *Elite* badge that was awarded to people who completed the BBC Micro original in the Eighties and sent their details into Acornsoft within three months of the game's release.

David Sheppard
Can I cheat and say my signed videogame/memorabilia collection? My favourite ones change week by week, but it's hard to look past pieces by Miyamoto, Koshiro and Kamiya.

Robb from 8/16/32bit
My original Panasonic FZ-1 3DO console. It's a system that was just a bit too early to the 3D boom, and just a tiny bit too underpowered to compete. Plus the original price... ouch!

Lee Jackson
I'd have to go with the doodle of Sonic, Tails and Knuckles that a friend got me when they met Hirokazu Yasuhara. To own such a thing is a huge honour.

chalkitdown
My (almost) complete collection of *N64/NGC Magazine*. I bloody loved these mags growing up. Only missing three issues (117, 118, 119) and I still haven't been able to track them down after all these years.



» [Game Boy] Use the fireball by holding the action button to create coins to spend.

KID DRACULA

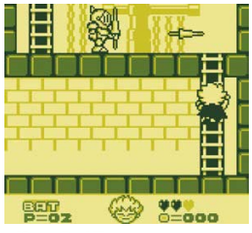
Dracula went cute in 1993 as Konami released a spin-off from the Castlevania series. Kid Dracula is a sequel to the Japanese-exclusive Famicom game, and let Game Boy owners sink their teeth into a new adventure

Words by Faith Johnson

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
- **PLATFORM:** GAME BOY
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PRICE TODAY:** £300+

» [Game Boy] The game begins with Kid Dracula forgetting all the spells his dad taught him.



» [Game Boy] There are many types of enemies to take down, such as this ghost knight.

THE GAME

Kid Dracula has forgotten all his powers, and he must rediscover them before he can take down the evil Garamoth, who is once again trying to take over the castle. This cutesy Game Boy platformer is technically a sequel to the Famicom game *Akumajō Special: Boku Dracula-kun*, but it feels more like a remake or reimagining of it, as many of the levels are similar in nature. *Kid Dracula* is also officially recognised as part of the *Castlevania* series, although it's not part of the main canon and is thought of by fans as a parody.

The game itself is a straightforward platformer that leans more towards being a kids' game due to its easy difficulty and large, cutesy sprites. That said, *Kid Dracula* looks incredible, especially given the hardware limitations. There's also a lot of variety in the gameplay, as every level unveils one of Kid Dracula's abilities and gives you more ways to take down enemies.

Between the levels, you'll have the chance to earn lives and coins by playing a minigame, chosen by selecting different crystal balls. The balls are magically mixed up by a witch, who also happens to be the shopkeeper. She'll also sell you extra lives and health, which are purchased using coins dropped by enemies blasted with a fireball. Other standout features in *Kid Dracula* are the large bosses, which have multiple phases, and the music, which gets the most out of the Game Boy's sound chip.

THE QUALITY

The critics were mostly positive about *Kid Dracula*, even if they didn't feel it was spectacular. In his April 1993 *Electronic Gaming Monthly* review, which scored 7/10, Ed Semrad said he liked the character "even though he looks quite unusual". He also explained it was a "well-designed" Game Boy game, and that if it was "any faster, the action would start blurring".

In the April 1993 review in *Nintendo Magazine System*, which gave a score of 77%, the reviewer said "the main sprites are unusually large for a Game Boy game". However, they also mentioned the game's difficulty, saying "the game itself is very easy, presenting little challenge for experienced platform

» [Game Boy] *Kid Dracula* features lots of bold, striking sprites, especially in the cutscenes.

fans". The review concluded that *Kid Dracula* was "probably best suited for the younger player".

Game Player reviewed the game, also giving it a score of 7/10. Jeff Lundrigan explained, "Although there's not a lot that's new in *Kid Dracula*, it does everything well, and that makes the title stand out."

WHY IT'S EXPENSIVE

Kid Dracula seems like an odd title to be so expensive, given it was released in 1993 when the Game Boy was still popular. Ultimately, the game didn't sell well, and there doesn't appear to have been any more print runs.

One reason for this could be that the Game Boy did have a lot of great platformers released for it, and seeing how *Kid Dracula* was reviewed quite conservatively by the gaming press, gamers just didn't see it as a must-have game at the time.

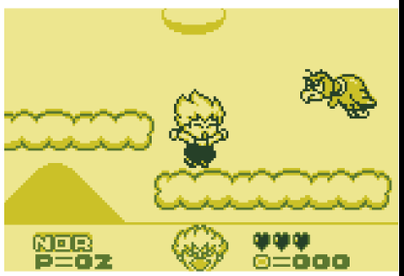
Another reason it's expensive is how few complete copies come up for sale. There are usually quite a few loose carts available for a fraction of the cost, but collectors will always want the box and manual, so this creates more demand in today's market. Also, being part of the *Castlevania* series, *Kid Dracula* has grown a following and is now more appreciated than when it first released.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

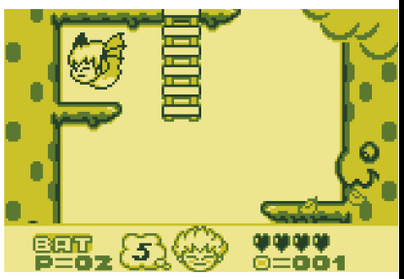
The cheapest way to try *Kid Dracula* is to buy a used loose cart, although this will still set you back over £75, with some better-condition carts fetching over £100. A similar title to try would be other big sprite platformers, such as *Super Mario Land 2: Six Golden Coins*, or the *Kirby Dreamland* titles, which match the difficulty and varied abilities of *Kid Dracula*.

A great alternative is to purchase the 2019 *Castlevania Anniversary Collection*. This comprehensive collection contains the Famicom game *Akumajō Special: Boku Dracula-kun*, interestingly now simply titled *Kid Dracula*, with an English translation.

This excellent package of titles is out on the PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch and Steam, with a choice of digital or physical on the console versions.



» [Game Boy] Most flying enemies can be ducked under instead of risking losing health.



» [Game Boy] You'll turn into a bat regularly to cross larger gaps in the levels.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Kid Dracula is an enjoyable, if easy, game to play through. The main character stands out with some funny supporting characters. The graphics are excellent, as is the soundtrack. It has lots of different levels as well as abilities to master, and it has a good pace to it. Collectors looking to complete their *Castlevania* collections will want to add this one to their shelf, while handheld platform fans will appreciate the quality *Kid Dracula* offers. ✱

I'VE GOT IT!

Which readers have sunk their teeth into this one?

Tom Taylor
I got the cart back in 2014 in a bundle with some other cartridges (such as *Balloon Kid*, *Faceball* 2000 and *Link's Awakening DX*) from someone on Gumtree for £40. A good deal in hindsight but it was over a decade ago!

Jocktastico
I bought it in September 1993 and it was £24.99 from Virgin Megastore.

Lars Schade
Yes, I own this game. I bought it at a retro exhibition in Oberhausen, Germany for €30, cart only. I think this was back in 2023.

Shagg-E
I'm playing *Kid Dracula* right now, and I'm stuck in the fourth stage...

Chris Guanche
I bought it as a kid in the US at release for whatever the MSRP was. I traded it in at GameStop 20+ years ago and now I wish I hadn't. [I bet – Ed]

Olivier Braillon
I remember buying it the year it came out during a trip to Germany, so it probably cost around £30-£40, although my parents bought it for me, so I can't be sure. It's such a wonderful game, but a tad too easy. I sold it and bought the cart before the price went insane (for around £40).

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

MY SPECTRUM LEGACY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

With regard to last month's Legacy Of The ZX Spectrum feature, my own legacy started Christmas 1984. I didn't even know what it was until I saw *Horace Goes Skiing* and *Jack The Nipper* next to it and realised it was a computer! From then on I only had friends who were Speccy owners (no really), and I would patiently wait to see what Oliver Frey would create for the latest *Crash* cover. I would buy games that received a Crash Smash like *Bubble Bobble*, *R-Type* and *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, and I was amazed at how they made these games with so little memory.

I loved the feel of the keys and the sound of games loading, unless you were growing up at the start of home gaming it's a hard feeling to explain, but that's the legacy that the Spectrum had on me. The feeling is different for every single person, whether they owned a Commodore, Amstrad, Acorn or any other system. Each model leaves a different legacy on the user.

Andrew Thomas

» [ZX Spectrum] It's no wonder Andrew adored the Speccy when it was pumping out games like this.

Thanks for sharing your Spectrum journey, Andrew. Hopefully the article resonated with you, as well as owners of other systems.

MUSIC MAESTRO

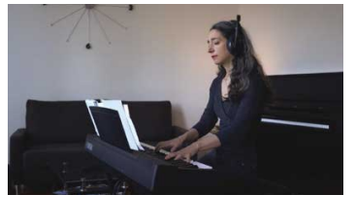
Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I recently stumbled across videos by an extremely talented lady named Grazia Pizzuto, who arranges and plays C64 music on the piano. The results are revelatory, elevating them far beyond nostalgia to show how sublime the original compositions are, as well as displaying Grazia's artistic and technical skills. Favourites of mine are (System 3's) *Myth*, *Thanatos*, *RoboCop*, and a truly extraordinary rendition of the *Central Park Theme* from *Last Ninja 2*. In some ways it's like hearing them as they were meant to be, but also like you remember them. I hope your other readers enjoy them as much as I have.

Regards,

Neil Coughlan

PS. Sincere condolences on the passing of your friend and colleague Nick. He will be missed.



» We've been really enjoying Grazia's compositions. You can find her work by visiting grazia-pizzuto.de

Thanks for the kind words about Nick, and thanks for introducing Grazia to us. We spent an entire evening listening to compositions on her blog. We'll have to try and sort an interview out with her.

MARATHON MAN

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

Does anyone on the team ever take part in gaming marathons? If you don't know, it's where you choose a series and play every game released for it, ideally in order of release. It can get a bit boring when you're playing them back to back, but it does allow you to see how a series has evolved with time. So far I've completed the *Dizzy* games (including spin-offs), the *Magic Knight* series (love those games), *Resident Evil* (including spin-offs) and *Final Fantasy* (just the main games). I'm thinking of tackling the *Uncharted* games next. I would love to hear your thoughts on this or if any other readers do anything similar.

Paul Jenkins

The only person who has ever attempted anything like this is Darran. He played all the *God Of War* games (from the first to the 2018 reboot) a couple

STAR LETTER

THE PS3 RULEZ

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I wouldn't say I'm one to wish my life away, but I've been looking forward to 2026 rolling around. The answer will no doubt cause the eyes of some of your readers to roll, but I'm too excited to mind – Sony's PlayStation 3, arguably its best console, is 20 years old, so it's ripe for a **Retro Gamer** cover.

Sony's third console was a huge deal for me, as it's the first one I ever purchased with my own cash. The PlayStation 3 was already a year old by the time I picked one up, but I was still suitably impressed by its early exclusives, particularly *Motorstorm*, *Ridge Racer 7* and *Heavenly Sword*. Granted, they didn't always hit the mark (*Lair*, I'm looking at you) and the system got off to a somewhat shaky start, but as the generation continued, the hits kept coming.

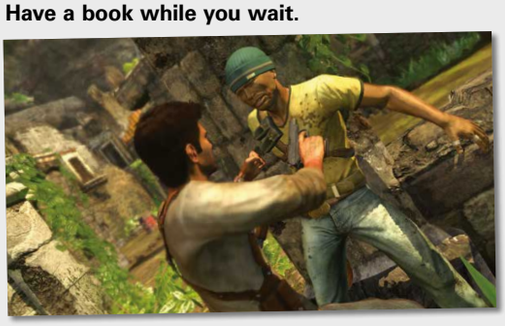
The *Uncharted* games are still timeless masterpieces, *The Last Of Us* is arguably one of the greatest games of all time, while I can still recall watching endless videos of *Afrika* and *Endless Ocean* on Youtube, wishing someone in PAL land would release them. It was *Demons' Souls* that truly grabbed me though and I hungrily devoured all the Fromsoftware games that followed.

You've already put Microsoft's Xbox 360 on the cover of the mag, so it only seems fair that you offer Sony's console the same courtesy. I'm sure I'm not the only one with fond memories of this fantastic console.

Yours hopefully,

Barry James

It's great to hear your passion for the PS3, Barry. There's no denying that things ramped up for the console after a very shaky start, and it does have some great exclusives. If we do run a cover, look out for it later in the year. Have a book while you wait.



» [PlayStation 3] The PlayStation 3 had some killer exclusives like the *Uncharted* series. Nathan Drake would look great on our cover.

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» [PC] Darran has been seeking out the *Ys* games on PC in order to do a massive run later this year.

of years back and he's now looking at playing through the *Ys* games. He did start *Resident Evil* himself a while back, but forgot he'd only recently completed *Resident Evil* 2 on the N64, so didn't fancy playing it again.

TIME FOR A CHANGE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I've been playing and collecting games for years but, due to rising prices these days, I've changed my approach recently. I've got over 30 consoles and approximately 1,600 games, but I now focus on the Switch and PS4. Both machines have a large library of retro and retro-style games, the Switch especially. I have a Neo Geo Pocket but can't justify the price of games. PS2 and GameCube prices are on the up and getting rarer, my factory-sealed *Pokémon Colosseum Pak* console was recently valued at around £2,500, that's mad!!

With the newer consoles having such good retro support and the Mini-Consoles around (I have many of these too), my hobby has become more affordable again. I would recommend this approach to anyone thinking of starting collecting. You still get the thrill of the hunt and, by the time these machines become retro, you'll have a sizeable collection. Win, win!

Finally, my heartfelt condolences over the loss of Nick. A truly genuine and passionate guy, he'll be forever missed.
Thanks for everything,
Craig Elliott

» [Switch] It's hard to justify the high prices of retro games when so many great compilations exist on modern systems.

Thanks for the kind words about Nick and thanks for sharing your collection focus, Craig. Preservation is still an issue for games, but there's no denying that there are lots of ways to play old classics nowadays without spending a small fortune. Darran binned off his DS and GBA *Castlevania*s due to M2's compilations and put the money towards holidays and other things he was interested in. We'd certainly like to hear if other readers do similar things.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Selling up

Darran has been downsizing his games collection. He sold off all of his boxed GBA games to a trader and has shifted around 60% of his SNES collection. He's put some of the funds towards a cruise around the Norwegian fjords in late-April and the rest has gone towards getting some grail 1/6 figures, including a gigantic Jabba The Hutt.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Amiga game?

» [Amiga] *Stunt Car Racer* is Craig Grannell's favourite Amiga game, he's clearly a man of great taste.

Serah
Portal (1986). A digital novel with a Compuserve-like interface in which a psychic love story plays out against the background of a crumbling utopia. Themes of Jungian psychology, collectivism vs individualism, gender and the nature of art are common for the genre but executed excellently here.

MYST
Superfrog! It's the first videogame I ever played, and has had a special place in my heart ever since.

OxGeek
This is an almost impossible question to answer. It's my favourite gaming machine. There are so many absolute classics. *Kick Off 2* would be my go-to answer as it's the best football game ever, despite what some others say. But then there's *Wings*, *Battle Squadron*, *Dyna Blaster*, etc…

Retronom
Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe. The best multiplayer brawl, pure, simple, exciting and full of immortal graphic and sound design! "Icecreeeeam!"

Simon J Broome
Turrican II: The Final Fight, mostly because of the perfect mix of action and visuals. Also the soundtrack, but that goes without saying.

Scott
I think it's *Menace*. I know it's not the best of its genre, but it was the first game I played on the A500 and it made me realise the 8-bit era was over.

Craig Grannell
Stunt Car Racer! Because… *Stunt Car Racer*! (OK, fine: a sensible answer. The tracks are bonkers. The crunchy physics are fab. It all still holds up, even if the AI is a bit basic. And there's the TNT hack with new tracks too. The only bad thing? There was never a sequel. Boo and hiss etc.)

planetmatt
Monkey Island because insult sword fighting is one of the greatest game mechanics ever created, and *Lemmings* because it's a fantastic example of an accessible puzzle game that didn't feel like a puzzle game with exceptional presentation. Both are very fun.

Cylus Resi
Oh geez! So many great games to choose from, but number one was *Frontier: Elite II*. It was mind-blowing and amazing. I waited so long for the sequel to *Elite* and this title didn't disappoint. I still play it to this day, right on Commander!

Ken Harrison
The Chaos Engine. The setting, the pixel art, the music and the gunplay all scream quality. I still play it regularly to this day. A truly great videogame and I absolutely love it

retro GAMER

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JON RITMAN ON HOW HIS KILLER SEQUEL KICKED ALL OTHER FOOTBALL GAMES INTO TOUCH

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Dead Rising

I'M DONE COVERING WARS, YOU KNOW

RETROREVIVAL

» XBOX 360 » 2006 » CAPCOM

I loved *Dead Rising*. I got to play it long before owning my own Xbox 360 thanks to my flatmate at the time going away for a week-long press trip. He'd just bought a new HDTV and kindly said I could use it to play *Dead Rising*, while he was away. (Maybe he just wanted me to get Achievements for him, I don't know.) And I played it to (un)death.

The game's time limit messed me up at the point where you fight Isabella, with the time running out just as the battle started. This perplexed me so much that I actually called Russ from *PowerStation* to see if there was anything I could do to avoid restarting. Unfortunately not, and so I started the game again, but more levelled up and knowledgeable about where to go, what to do and where the mini-chainsaws were after killing the clown. And I just kept playing.

The route from the safe house became ingrained in my head. Ferrying all the survivors around, equipping them with guns so they had a bit of a chance, and still managing to lose some when they maddeningly wouldn't follow me. Mopping up the bosses, killing the goons on the Humvee, fighting out of the cult and so on.

Even still, I hadn't completed it by the time my flatmate got back from his trip, so he got to watch the ending at least. Then I played it again when I got a 360, and again when the remastered version came out. But only for a short time, because by this point I'd played *Dead Rising* (and all the sequels) far too much. Even the mall music makes me wince these days. So now I hate *Dead Rising*. What a fantastic game. ✱

ENDGAME

SUPER STAR WARS: RETURN OF THE JEDI (1994, SNES)

» Did you know that the title to George Lucas' sixth *Star Wars* film refers to Anakin Skywalker and not Luke Skywalker? You did? Damn, we were hoping to impress you. OK, well here's what happens at the end of JVC's third SNES *Star Wars* game

01

» After a gut-churning Death Star escape, Lando Calrissian makes his departure in the Millennium Falcon. As he flies to Endor he hopes Han won't mention that time he wore his clothes at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

02

» You reach Endor and Han's still reeling over the fact Leia once passionately kissed her brother to worry about Lando's wardrobe theft. Luke's looking pretty happy as well, considering he's just torched his dad.

03

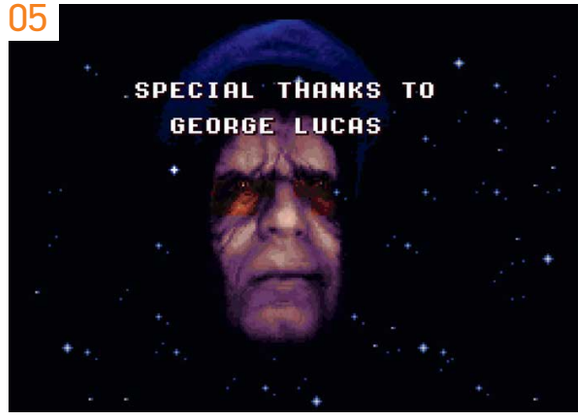
YOU HAVE DESTROYED THE NEW
DEATH STAR AND DEFEATED THE
EMPEROR.
THIS DAY WILL BE REMEMBERED
FOR ETERNITY AS THE DAY YOU
SAVED THE GALAXY FROM EVIL.

» You've defeated the Empire and the evil Emperor is no more. Who would have thought that a being of such power could get given the shaft by literally being thrown down a giant shaft? What a silly Sith Lord he was.

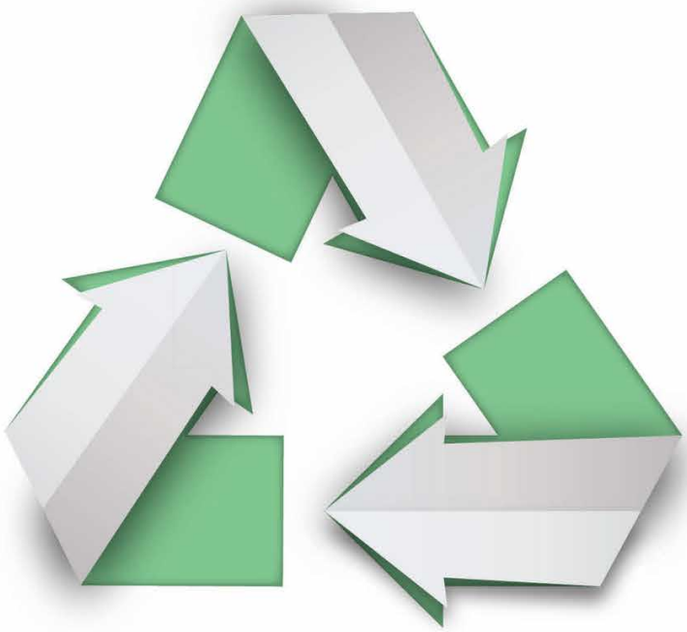
04

» Now here's a rare sight that you don't see very often in today's *Star Wars* lore. The Force ghost of Anakin is still being depicted by Sebastian Shaw and not that young upstart Hayden Christensen. We're amazed old George didn't go back and butcher this like he did with the films.

05



» Is this screen proof that JJ Abrams once completed *Super Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi*? Did he see this ominous-looking image of the Emperor and decide that Darth Vader's master wasn't actually dead. We'll never know for sure, but we do know he ruined the Skywalker saga. Thanks JJ.



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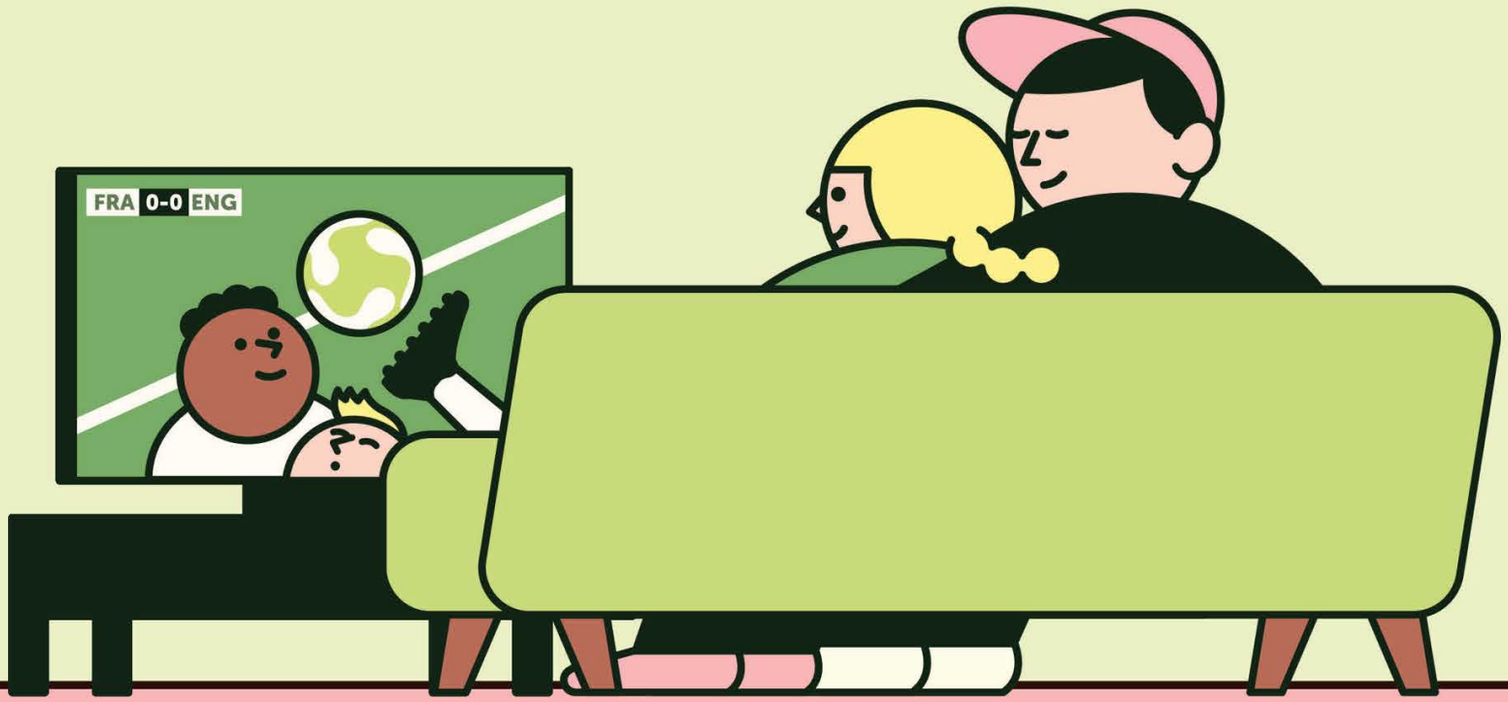

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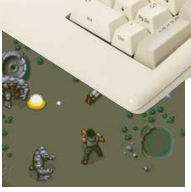
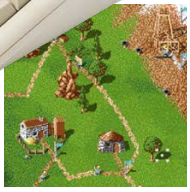

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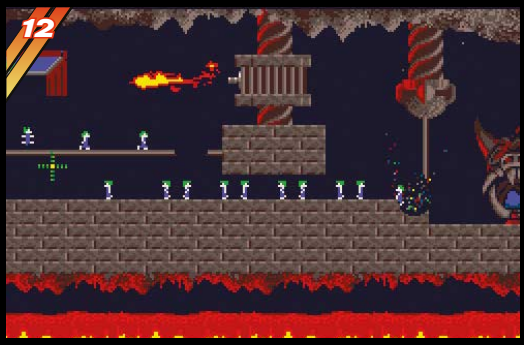
THE MINI AMIGA 500 COMPANION

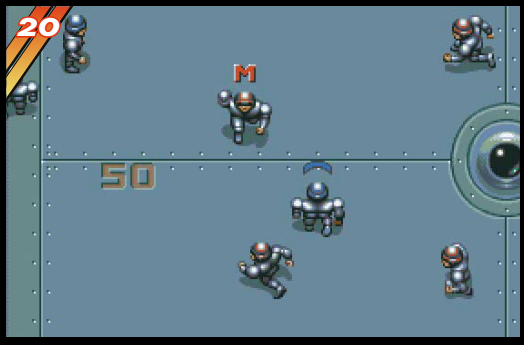
One of the things that has always impressed me about the Amiga 500 is its sheer versatility. While I embraced the world of consoles and only owned an Amiga for a short while, the sheer breadth and depth of its software was genuinely inspiring.

From complex point-and-click adventures, to (occasionally perfect) arcade conversions and ambitious open-world adventure games, it seemed like Commodore's machine could do everything, and do it very well indeed.

I would borrow shareware disks off friends and spend hours combing through them, play the many coverdisks that came with the likes of *Amiga Power* and spend way too many hours with the brilliant *Sensible World Of Soccer*. For me, Commodore's machine burned briefly, but brightly, and while I soon returned to the world of console gaming, I never forgot solving puzzles in *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, punishing my mates at *Speedball 2* and being genuinely blown away by the high-speed visuals of *Batman*'s 3D sections.

This book compiles some of the greatest Amiga games you'll ever experience. Some put graphics before gameplay, while others introduced completely new genres, but every single one of them is worthy of revisiting. How many did you get to experience in the Amiga's heyday, and how many do you still enjoy today?





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» [Amiga] Its game mechanics may have aged, but *Shadow Of The Beast*'s sumptuous visuals still hold up really well.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

SHADOW OF THE BEAST

1989 • REFLECTIONS

While *Shadow Of The Beast* is certainly one of the weakest games to feature within this book, it's nonetheless an incredibly important one, being one of the first to truly push the power of Commodore's 16-bit computer. Seen by many gamers at the time as a reason to upgrade from their aging 8-bit micros, Reflections' game offers an atmospheric, genuinely haunting score, an outrageous amount of parallax scrolling, and huge, impressive enemies to battle.

Yes, it can be argued that *Shadow Of The Beast* is little more than a very impressive tech demo, but there is no denying the impact it had on the Amiga back in the day. Its success saw it ported to numerous other systems, as well as two Amiga sequels that greatly improved on the original game.

» [Amiga] You'll take to the air later in the game, but don't think this extra manoeuvrability will make things easier for you.

» [Amiga] There's some striking, deliciously grotesque imagery to be found in *Shadow Of The Beast*'s enemy designs.

UNLEASHING THE BEAST

MARTIN EDMONDSON ON THE CREATION OF SHADOW OF THE BEAST

How did *Shadow Of The Beast* come about?

"Our intention was to create a game that really showed what the Amiga was capable of and how much more powerful it was compared to the Atari ST. At the time, most Amiga games were quick ports of the ST version with maybe just some very small improvements. That was understandable because at that point, the ST had a much larger user base. The Amiga, however, absolutely blew the ST into the weeds in hardware terms. The game we were creating was very deliberately tailored to the custom chips in the Amiga, almost like a demoscene approach. The Amiga had six main custom chips that we maxed out to create the game's unique look and effects."

How did Psygnosis become involved with the game?

"We hadn't told anyone at Psygnosis we were working on anything new. We kind of surprised them with a demo. It ran at 60fps and had the polished graphics that you see in the first level of the published version of *Shadow Of The Beast*. The overall visual approach of the parallax was inspired by what you see when looking sideways out of the side of a speeding train, with the foreground trees and pylons speeding by, while the distant mountains appear to barely move. They grabbed various other members of the publishing team and art teams to come and crowd around the monitor, and immediately started discussing it becoming our next game."

Tell us about the Roger Dean connection.

"It was decided early on to have a new size and shape of box to incorporate a landscape piece of Roger Dean's artwork. It must have been a nightmare for retailers. But it looked good and certainly stood out. We were all keen for Roger to have free rein and just give us his interpretation of the game's name. He took an interesting creative angle, making the creatures running away from the shadow look almost mechanical in their design."

Why was *Shadow Of The Beast* so hard?

"That's probably due to my arcade background, the fact that I enjoyed hard games. It was compounded by the fact that I played the game so much during development and testing that I kept thinking it was a bit too easy. I should have recognised that and adjusted for it, looking back."

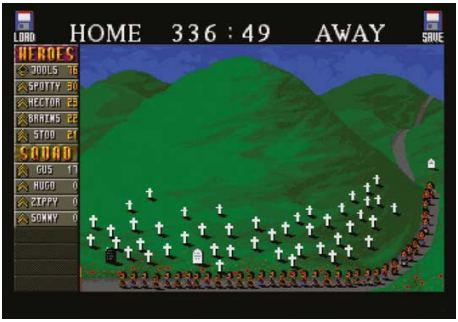
» [Amiga] Knowing when to separate your squad and when to keep them together is key to survival.

MINIATURE WARFARE

CANNON FODDER

1993 • SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

Clouded by unfair controversy at the time, due to its "War has never been so much fun" tagline, Sensible Software's game remains a timeless classic. You have to navigate the maze-like stages and varied environments while taking down an ever-increasing number of enemies with a fragile squad of soldiers. There are buildings to destroy, civilians to protect and even an enemy leader to kidnap across the game's many missions, and you'll often be required to split your meagre forces to get the best results. The mouse-driven gameplay *Cannon Fodder* utilises remains exceptionally intuitive, the tiny graphics are filled with character, and it's all laced with Sensible Software's warped sense of humour. A solid sequel followed in 1994 that introduced an interesting time-travel theme. (We like to pretend the third game, released in 2011, never actually happened.)



» [Amiga] Gotham's favourite vigilante takes a face-full of bullets. Ouch! That's what we call a bat-tering.

» [Amiga] Using a grappling hook to swing the Batmobile nimbly around tight corners is a lovely touch.

THE DARK KNIGHT LEVELS UP

BATMAN

1989 • OCEAN SOFTWARE

Ocean's brilliant adaptation of Tim Burton's *Batman* movie was another good reason to upgrade to an Amiga. Things start off strongly thanks to an impressive opening which features slick voice samples and some excellent audio along with superb art of Batman and the Joker, but it improves significantly once you start the actual game. While the core platforming of *Batman* is a lot of fun, graphics aside, it doesn't feel like that much of a step-up from Ocean's 8-bit versions. It's the astonishing 3D Batmobile and Batwing sections of the game that truly elevate *Batman* and they remain technically wowing today. Fast-paced and full of action, they're a world away from what Ocean pulled off with the 8-bit games and truly highlight the power of Commodore's machine. Equally powerful was the decision to bundle the game (along with several other titles) with the Amiga, ensuring amazing Christmas sales for Commodore.

THIS DUNGEON DOESN'T DRAG-ON

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER II: THE LEGEND OF DARKMOON

1992 • WESTWOOD STUDIOS

CRYSTL
ASANTHUS
TANKIE
TELOS
HP
AS SOON AS THE SHACKLES DROP FROM HER WRISTS, SHE WHISPERS, "BEWARE THESE HALLS! I WAS CAPTURED BY THE EVIL CLERICS OF THIS TEMPLE. WHAT PLANS THEY HAD FOR ME I DO NOT KNOW, BUT LAST NIGHT I SAW WHAT SEEMED TO BE A THOUSAND DEATH SERVANTS WALKING THESE HALLS. PLEASE TAKE ME WITH YOU! DON'T LEAVE ME HERE TO DIE!" MAY SHE JOIN YOU?
YES
NO

» [Amiga] Many NPCs you encounter can be recruited into your party.

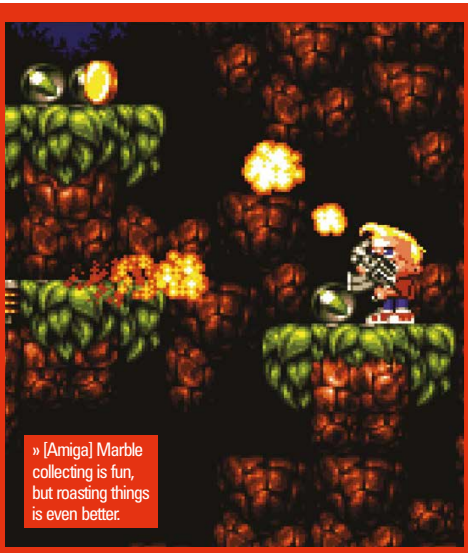
Westwood's *Eye Of The Beholder* had already wowed Amiga owners by improving on the excellent *Dungeon Master*. With its ambitious sequel, Westwood eclipsed both games, delivering not only one of the best into-the-screen dungeon crawlers of the time, but arguably the best *Dungeons & Dragons* game for that period as well.

Everything about *The Legend Of Darkmoon* is a huge improvement over what came before. It boasts greatly enhanced visuals, densely populated and intricately designed dungeons, and a huge array of terrifying monsters to battle. In an inspired touch, fans of the original *Eye Of The Beholder* could carry their party across, ensuring fantastic continuity for those who loved the original game. The third game in the series never made it to the Amiga, but considering how much disk-swapping the second game suffered from on the system, that was probably a good thing.

RUN, GUN AND FUN
RUFF 'N' TUMBLE

1994 • WUNDERKIND

Imagine if you were able to play a game where you completed each stage by simply collecting different-coloured marbles. Now imagine that you had a range of outrageously exotic weaponry and that you could shoot metallic owls in the face with those very weapons. Well imagine no longer. Simply play Wunderkind's excellent run-and-gun and marvel at its frenetic gameplay, outrageously good visuals and exceedingly funky music.



» [Amiga] Marble collecting is fun, but roasting things is even better.

SUPREMELY STRATEGIC
SUPREMACY

1990 • PROBE SOFTWARE

Probe's *Supremacy* remains a genuinely excellent game and is easily the best space strategy game on the Amiga. Coded by Dave Perry (who would eventually go on to found Shiny Entertainment) *Supremacy* features four distinctive alien races to beat, a cluster of planets to seize control of and a whole variety of ways to take them out. It's all tied together by an intuitive control system and a truly daunting 90-page manual.

» [Amiga] There are plenty of useful resources for advancing your campaign in *Supremacy*, providing you can afford them.

» [Amiga] Well this fella doesn't look very friendly.

DUNGEON CRAWLING IN SPACE
CAPTIVE

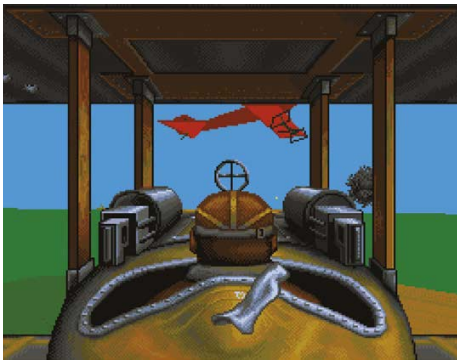
1990 • ANTONY CROWTHER

It would be easy to dismiss *Captive* as nothing more than a futuristic *Dungeon Master* clone, but that does Antony Crowther's game a huge disservice. There is a large number of planets to discover and land on, indoor and outdoor locations and dangerous monsters to fight, while the premise of using a selection of different droids to plan your escape is a novel one. A sequel, called *Liberation: Captive 2*, arrived in 1993.

UP, UP AND AWAY
WINGS

1990 • CINEMAWARE

This marvellous Cinemaware game puts you in the shoes of a trainee biplane pilot during the First World War. It not only features some intense dogfighting and a good array of minigames, it also has a surprisingly poignant story. Like many Cinemaware titles, it's a breathtakingly epic-looking game with tremendous visuals. It was ported to the Game Boy Advance in 2002, while a remastered version of the game debuted in 2014.



» [Amiga] Cinemaware was adept at delivering fun, film-like experiences, and *Wings* was a prime example.

A WINNING FORMULA
FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX

» [Amiga] You'll need some skilled manoeuvring to get past these seasoned drivers.

1991 • GEOFF CRAMMOND

Even if you're not a fan of Formula One it's hard not to be impressed by Geoff Crammond's astonishing racer. Driving assists, incredibly accurate tracks, sensational real-world physics and the ability to tweak numerous aspects of your car made *Formula One Grand Prix* feel incredibly different to other racers of the time. The genre has obviously come a long way since its release, but Crammond's game still holds up remarkably well, largely due to its attention to realism and polished 3D engine.

WHO NEEDS DISNEY LAND?
THEME PARK

1994 • BULLFROG

There are numerous simulation games on the Amiga, but few match the subtle intricacies that *Theme Park* offers. Building the park can be something of a puzzle in itself, as you manage queues, choose key positions for rides and alter the salt level on your chips to ensure maximum returns on the drinks you sell to thirsty visitors. Once the park finally opens it becomes a frantic juggling act to stay on top of the action and keep everyone happy.

» [Amiga] We're anticipating big queues of eager punters for the Ghost House, but not so many for the Bouncy Castle.

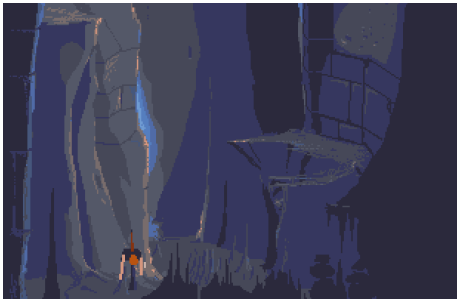
» [Amiga] One of the best sequences of the game happens when Lester and Buddy are making their escape.

AN EPIC CINEMATIC QUEST

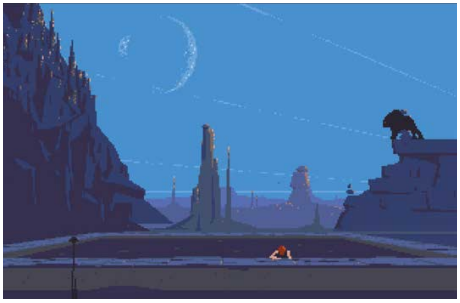
ANOTHER WORLD

1991 • ERIC CHAHI

If you can get past the aggressive cat-like alien found at the beginning of *Another World* you'll find Eric Chahi's game to be an incredibly cinematic experience. The atmosphere that builds throughout is genuinely superb and it only deepens as scientist Lester Knight Chaykin forms an uneasy alliance with an alien and tries to escape the hostile planet he's found himself on following an accident with a particle accelerator. While many will be frustrated with its abstract nature, numerous hazards and constant deaths, there's no denying the game's hypnotic appeal. Despite being remastered numerous times over the years, Chahi's game only ever received one sequel, the 1994 Mega-CD exclusive *Heart Of The Alien*.



» [Amiga] The alien world Lester finds himself in following his accident is unforgiving, so expect to die in numerous ways.



» [Amiga] Pay attention to that beastie loitering on the cliffs in the background – you'll have a face-to-face encounter with it soon.

INSIDE ANOTHER WORLD

ERIC CHAHI REVISITS HIS MEMORABLE CINEMATIC MASTERPIECE

What did you set out to create?
"I wanted to create a truly immersive game in a consistent, living universe with a movie feel. I never wanted to create an interactive movie. Instead I wanted to extract the essence of a movie – the rhythm and the drama – and place it into game form. To do this I decided to leave the screen free of the usual information aids."

What inspired *Another World*?
"Everything I liked at that time. This included pictorial art and the movie *Star Wars*. Science fiction books, comics and fantasy art also inspired me. Painters like Michael Whelan, Richard Corben and Frank Frazetta also provided some material for me to draw ideas from."

Why make the game using polygons?
"I played the *Dragon's Lair* port for the Amiga, which boasted incredible full-screen action scenes, and I became hooked on achieving similar life-like animation. The graphics in *Dragon's Lair* were compressed bitmaps read directly from the disk. I thought I could do the same with polygons since the animation was flat, so I wrote some vector-based code. The idea was to use polygons not only for movie-like animation and cutscenes, but also for the sprites. This proved to be a major advantage because you had large sprites that were scalable and took up less disk space than traditional sprites."

Why is *Another World* so difficult?
"*Another World* is a game of survival in a hostile world, and it really is about life and death. Death doesn't mean the end of the game but it is a part of the exploration, a part of the experience. That's why the death sequences are so diversified. To solve many puzzles I recognised that you had to die at least once. It is a controversial point in *Another World*'s design, because it truly serves the emotional side of things. *Another World* must be considered first as an intense, emotional experience."

A BLOODY GOOD GAME

MOONSTONE: A HARD DAYS KNIGHT

1991 • ROB ANDERSON

This gory masterpiece never seems to get the attention it deserves. A combination of turn-based and real-time combat with some neat RPG mechanics to spice things up, Rob Anderson's game has up to four players competing as rival knights to retrieve the fabled Moonstone. While it's an adventure at its heart, *Moonstone* is a hard game to pigeonhole as it draws from numerous genres to deliver a thoroughly unique experience. It's exceptionally brutal to boot, with every fight turning into a vicious (but thoroughly entertaining) bloodbath.

» [Amiga] Death comes often in the punishing *Moonstone*, but at least it looks nice when you're being executed.

» [Amiga] This stage will be instantly familiar if you've ever played *Lemmings* before.

FURRY AND FABULOUS

LEMMINGS

1991 • DMA DESIGN

Despite what you may have been told otherwise, lemmings don't participate in real-life mass suicide, as the footage revealed in Disney's award-winning documentary *White Wilderness* was faked. The notion stuck, however, and Disney's subterfuge led to this wildly clever puzzle game that has you trying to save as many foolhardy lemmings as possible. While the tunes are delightful, it's the genuinely clever level design that makes DMA Design's game so fun to play, as you can assign a number of different skills like climbing and blocking to your cute critters to tackle stages in many differnt ways. While numerous sequels have been released over the years, the original remains our favourite by a wide margin.

» [Amiga] There's nothing more satisfying than causing all your lemmings to explode en masse. Sometimes we'll just do it for the funsies.

MAKING LEMMINGS

MIKE DAILLY ON HOW DMA'S FOOLISH FURBALLS CAME TO BE

What was the most difficult aspect of creating *Lemmings*?

"There were a few issues. Making the lemmings walk and move exactly, binding feet to ground rather than sliding, actually getting collision working on a pixel basis was tricky – and in fact, *Lemmings* never worked totally for 'steel' things. On console it was a nightmare of the highest order. The five-screen bitmap was utterly horrible, and I am still amazed they managed to port it to the Game Boy!"

***Lemmings* is known for its difficulty. Did any of the levels keep you puzzled for ages?**

"Nope. By the time we were churning out levels, we were all so very good at it, we could solve any level in seconds – pretty much. The only tricky bit was actually doing the level, but even then most would be solved in only a few attempts."

Which of your levels is your favourite and why?

"It's Hero Time is my all-time favourite, because it had a little bit of lateral thinking, and was far from obvious as to how you do it. Lots of people – including testers at Psygnosis – got utterly stumped on it, which makes me happy."

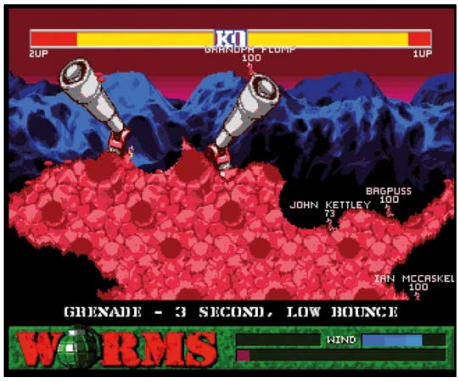
With the benefit of hindsight, is there anything about *Lemmings* that you would have done differently at all?

"Tech-wise, *Lemmings 2* solved everything as far as the console went, but game-wise… it would have been nice with a background."

Have you ever had any memorable interactions with *Lemmings* fans?

"We would occasionally get sent odd *Lemmings* items. Pillows, drawings – even wood carvings! I do meet some at shows, and that's always fun. What gets me most though, is the love of the game even after all this time. Seeing weird *Lemmings* 'things' happening – like the group that walked around a computer show one after the other dressed as lemmings – being Blockers and the like. That makes me smile!"

» [Amiga] The timeless gameplay of *Worms* saw it converted to countless systems and receive numerous sequels and spin-offs.



» [Amiga] Weapon drops are incredibly useful (as well as bizarre), so make sure you grab them as soon as they're parachuted in.

WHEN WORMS GO TO WAR

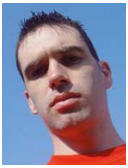
WORMS

1995 • TEAM17

Like the later *Angry Birds*, *Worms* took a well-established genre and married it to an insanely cute theme. The end result not only propelled coder Andy Davidson into the gaming limelight, but gave Team17 an exceptionally strong franchise that's still going today. Controlling a group of warring weapons-trained annelids might not sound fun, but it really is, thanks to its carefully balanced weapons, quirky humour and cute-looking visuals. For many (us included) it's the ultimate Amiga party game. Little wonder then that the popular sequel *Worms Armageddon* was given the compilation treatment recently by Digital Eclipse.

ASSEMBLING THE ANNELIDS

ANDY DAVIDSON ON CREATING TEAM17'S BIGGEST HIT



Tell us about the origins of *Worms*

"It started life as a version of the simple tank games that had been around since the 8-bit days. It was called *Artillery* then and ran on the cutting-edge hardware that was a Casio graph-plotting calculator! It was just an experiment to see if I could get it to do something a bit more interesting than drawing a graph. Giving the player the freedom to move around, and adding teams, changed the gameplay substantially and introduced new levels of strategy. That set me thinking about what other elements I could introduce, and the game snowballed from there"

Why choose to have worms as your protagonists?

"Back then they were just about the only type of creature that hadn't been in a game. This was pre-*Earthworm Jim*, of course. I wanted something more interesting than tanks or soldiers and they also suited the small size required as I was going to have up to 16 of them in play. The public also had a right to know about the more violent side of a worm's nature, which had so far gone unreported by the media in general."

How were Team17 involved with the game?

"It was about 75% done when I showed it to Team17. There was still a list of things I had left to add to it, but the game was pretty much there. I was left to do what I wanted with the Amiga version while Team17 handled the ports."

How did the Concrete Donkey weapon come about?

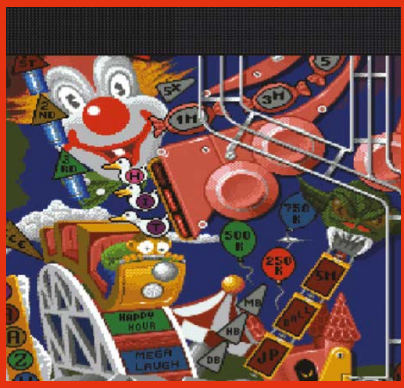
"It was born out of a pub conversation, when I was recalling how as a kid I thought my parents had covered a donkey in concrete and put it in the front garden. They claimed it was a garden ornament, I wasn't so sure. So whenever they weren't around I chipped away at it with a stone to see if I could find fur underneath, and prove it was once a real donkey! It seemed only right to immortalise it in the game."

A BUMPER PACKAGE

PINBALL FANTASIES

1992 • DIGITAL ILLUSIONS

Before it rose to dominance with franchises like *Battlefield*, DICE made a trio of excellent pinball games that started off life on the Amiga. The middle child, *Pinball Fantasies*, is easily the best of the bunch, thanks to great variety across its four tables, exceptionally smooth scrolling and marvellous physics that do a fantastic job of matching the feel of an authentic pinball table. While none of the tables you'll find in *Pinball Fantasies* are as interactive or as expansive as the more modern examples you'll find today, they all still play very well and they're significantly bigger than the ones featured in *Pinball Dreams*. The four available tables will challenge all types of gamer, from casual pinball fans to the hardcore, while the clever themes and fun sound effects add to the game's broad appeal.



» [Amiga] Party Land is a fun pinball table with easy ramps to fling your ball up and plenty of point-scoring bumpers.

» [Amiga] Honestly, where's a rocket launcher when you need one?

ANT ATTACK!

IT CAME FROM THE DESERT

1989 • CINEMAWARE

While *Defender Of The Crown* was a fantastic calling card for Cinemaware, it was *It Came From The Desert* that cemented the company as one of the Amiga's most fascinating developers. Inspired by classic B-movies of the Fifties with their marauding wildlife, the aim is to protect the town of Lizard Breath from invading giant ants. Killer graphics, a great script and some entertaining minigames make for a very potent adventure.

FLIGHTS OF FANCY

F-19: STEALTH FIGHTER

1990 • MPS LABS

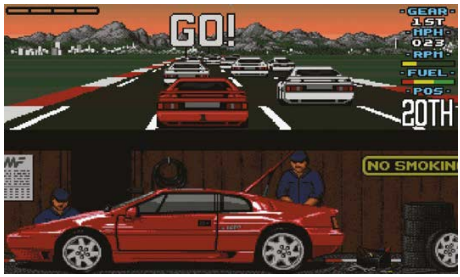
Yes it's ridiculously complicated to get to grips with, but once it all finally clicks *F-19* becomes the Amiga's best flight sim. Graphically it's superb, with detailed visuals and interesting environments to fly through, while the varied missions, tense dogfights and excellent physics ensure the gameplay always remains riveting. Like many sims of the time it shipped with some very useful keyboard overlays.

» [Amiga] If you think taking off is hard, wait until you try landing…

LICENCE TO DRIVE
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE

1990 • MAGNETIC FIELDS

While this tremendous racer was succeeded by two equally good sequels, many purists opt for Magnetic Fields' first game in the series. *Lotus Esprit* remains a wonderful arcade racer thanks to its 32 challenging tracks, three difficulty levels and a banging soundtrack. While it's certainly great fun as a single-player experience, the game really comes into its own when you take on an opponent in its enjoyable split-screen mode.



» [Amiga] The later games in the *Lotus* series would feature a more conventional full screen for their single-player modes.

CASH FOR KILLS
BLOOD MONEY

1989 • DMA DESIGN

Before it found tremendous success with *Grand Theft Auto*, DMA Design was making entertaining blasters like *Blood Money*. Inspired by numerous arcade games, it's a truly satisfying shmup where you can play as a jet, helicopter, submarine or even a spaceman, blasting enemies, collecting coins and buying power-ups. Graphically superb with an equally stunning soundtrack, *Blood Money* still holds up today as one of the Amiga's best shmups.

» [Amiga] We've always enjoyed the coin acquisition aspect of *Blood Money*. Now it's time to spend our cash!

» [Amiga] The squirrel-centred *Mr Nutz* is arguably one of the most impressive-looking platformers on the Amiga. It's fun too.

A NUTTY PLATFORMER
MR NUTZ: HOPPIN' MAD

1994 • NEON

Along with *Superfrog* this is probably the best platformer on the Amiga. It plays very much like *Sonic The Hedgehog* (in fact, it's rumoured to have started off as a *Sonic* port) with superfast scrolling and plenty of items to collect. It stands apart, however, thanks to the strange, but oddly compelling, adventure-style intros found at the beginning of each stage.

» [Amiga] Don't be fooled by the chunky look, this was tremendously exhilarating back in 1989.

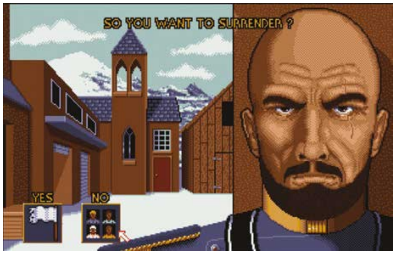
RIGHT ON TRACK

STUNT CAR RACER

1989 • GEOFF CRAMMOND

Geoff Crammond loves racing games, and he loves physics. He combined his two passions to create the insanely fun *Stunt Car Racer*, a highly enjoyable racing game that takes place on crazy elevated tracks. While it certainly shares elements with Sega's arcade racer *Power Drift*, the two games couldn't be more different in their execution. While aspects of Crammond's game are just as outrageous as Sega's, thanks to that passion for physics the game itself feels far more grounded and you'll need to consider how you approach every turn and slope if you're to claim victory. It's nowhere near as fast as Sega's game, but it remains a tremendous achievement thanks to its slick visuals and dynamic and exciting tracks. And in a nice touch it's possible to enjoy head-to-head races against other Amiga and even Atari ST owners.

» [Amiga] We love how the viewpoint mimics the fact that you're wearing a pair of goggles to protect your eyes.



BRAVE NEW WORLD

MIDWINTER

1990 • RAINBIRD

Not content with cramming a gigantic game world into the humble Spectrum with *The Lords Of Midnight,* Mike Singleton's 16-bit debut was even more ambitious. Set in an apocalyptic future when snow covers the world, *Midwinter* is full of neat touches, including managing 32 recruits (all with background bios that affect how they interact with other characters), a variety of ways to navigate the world and even injuries to different body parts. *Midwinter*'s attention to detail is truly staggering and it's tremendously thrilling to explore the gigantic island the game is set on as you never know what to expect next. There's no denying that *Midwinter* is rather clunky to play today but its sheer scope and ambition remains as dazzling now as it did in 1990.

BUBBLE-POPPING BLISS

PANG

1990 • OCEAN SOFTWARE

The Amiga is host to a large number of excellent arcade conversions and we could have easily filled this book with them. As it stands, we're short of space, so only the best have made the cut. And when it comes to the best, Ocean's adaptation of *Pang* (or *Buster Bros*, depending on where you live), is right up there as one of the Amiga's best examples. If you've never played the Amiga version before you'll be pleased to hear it's virtually an arcade perfect port, with the aim of the game being to burst bubbles until the playing area is clear. Of course, the bubbles divide when hit, meaning things get hectic very quickly, particularly when a second player gets involved.

» [Amiga] You've a tight time limit so pop those bubbles as fast as you can!

» [Amiga] *Speedball 2* rewards quick, decisive, even instinctive, play, so don't overthink each move you make.

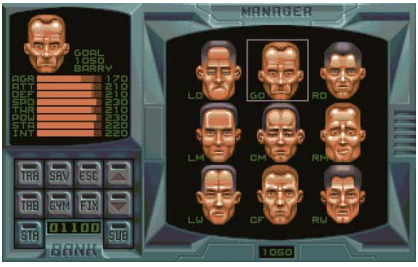
THE BITMAPS GET VIOLENT

SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE

1990 • THE BITMAP BROTHERS

Many consider *Speedball 2* to be one of the finest sports games of all time and we'd be hard-pressed to argue with them. You certainly felt it was the greatest Amiga game of all time when we asked you back in issue 133. *Brutal Deluxe* is the follow-up to the 1988 hit *Speedball* and improves on its predecessor in a number of significant ways. The game's action is drastically ramped up thanks to the fact each team now has nine players on the pitch rather than the five found in the original *Speedball*. A generous number of wall and floor targets can be hit for additional points, while numerous multipliers can also help rack up your score during matches. While its superb Tournament mode and sleek, metallic aesthetic means it still holds up well today, it's *Speedball 2*'s gripping two-player mode that remains the game's most compelling aspect.

» [Amiga] You've only got to see this moody image to instantly know you're looking at a game by the Bitmap Brothers.



» [Amiga] Managing your team when they're off the pitch is every bit as important as when they're actually playing.

CREATING A BRUTAL MASTERPIECE

MIKE MONTGOMERY ON THE BITMAPS' KILLER SEQUEL

How did *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe* improve on the original *Speedball*?

"I think the whole concept of *Speedball 2* was different. What we wanted to do with *Speedball 2* was all of the things that we really didn't have time to do with *Speedball*. So the viewpoint was slightly changed, the graphics were a lot better – it was a different game to a certain extent, wasn't it? I think *Speedball 2* was just a natural progression."

How did the Amiga version of the game compare to the Atari ST offering?

"The framerate was a lot better and that was important because the better it was, the better the game experience of that type of game would be. It wouldn't matter for a turn-based game, but with an action game, you needed to be slick and quick."

Tell us about *Brutal Deluxe*'s scoring system.

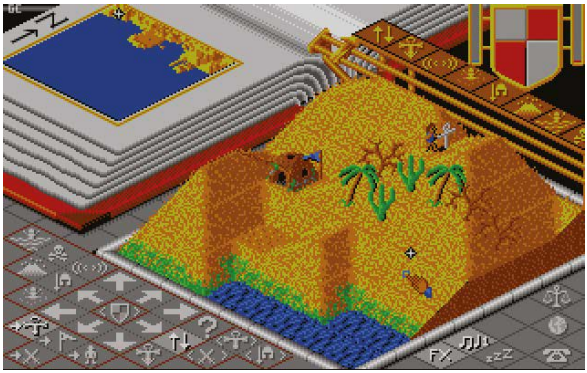
"The basic scoring methods and Warp Gates were inspired by *Pro Pinball*. In fact, a lot is based on a pinball machine, really. We just thought it would be a good idea to do something different and to say this is not a football game. We wanted something that had virtually no rules, with a scoring mechanism that would let you boost your points, which is where the multiplier and Bounce Domes came in."

Why do you think the game remains so popular with players today?

"In football, you may get a corner and you need to score off of it; in *Speedball*, you could be in a tight position with a few seconds left, go for a Bounce Dome and bang, you've won the game. It's what made the game exciting and it's why people still play it. I mean, [a few] years ago I was on the Underground in London, and two guys were talking about *Speedball 2* on the Amiga and it was, like, fuck! I would have told them that I made the game but it was too packed and I had to get off, but I heard this conversation and it was, like, fucking hell, people still talk very passionately about it."

» [Amiga] Chase down that ball and try your hardest not to get tackled by the other team.

» [Amiga] There's a lot of work ahead if you want to make this area habitable.



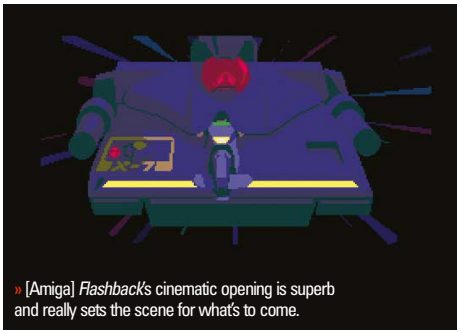
» [Amiga] You'll need to find suitable ground to build up your village.

WHEN TWO GODS GO TO WAR

POPULOUS

1989 • BULLFROG

***Populous* not only put Bullfrog on the map, it also introduced the world to the genius of Peter Molyneux.** Free of the hype that would burden several of his later games, *Populous* helped popularise the god sim, allowing you to build up an army of followers using a clever icon-driven interface that remains effortlessly simple to use today. There's something strangely empowering as you watch your followers go about their business, knowing you can upset their day-to-day activities on a whim, and it's little wonder that the game went on to receive several sequels.



» [Amiga] *Flashback*'s cinematic opening is superb and really sets the scene for what's to come.

IT'S NOT A SEQUEL

FLASHBACK

1992 • DELPHINE SOFTWARE

Often mistaken for a sequel to *Another World* (most likely because they both feature rotoscoping and come from the same publisher), *Flashback* is very much its own game. While protagonist Conrad B Hart's epic adventure is just as cinematic, it's far more arcade-focussed than *Another World*, with a much greater emphasis on platforming. What's particularly interesting about *Flashback* is that it was built from the ground up for Sega's Mega Drive, and creator Paul Cuisset considers that release to be the definitive version of the game. Despite this, it remains a bona fide classic on the Amiga, being just as graphically ambitious and filled with moody music and clever puzzles. While two sequels and a remake have appeared over the years, none of them have matched the majesty of the original game.

BULLFROG GOES TO WAR
SYNDICATE

1993 • BULLFROG

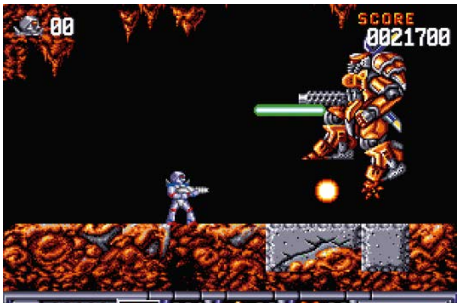
Only a Peter Molyneux game would have a weapon that brainwashes enemies not to fight you. As you'd expect from a Bullfrog production, *Syndicate*'s gameplay is of an incredibly high standard and has your squad of cyborg agents pulling off complex missions in a stunning isometric environment. Its success led to a couple of sequels in the late-Nineties as well as a rather disappointing 2012 FPS reboot.

» [Amiga] On patrol with your squad of cybernetically enhanced officers.

A SUPERCHARGED SEQUEL
TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT

1991 • FACTOR 5

Playing like a cross between *Metroid* and *Psycho-Nics Oscar*, *Turrican II* is one of the best run-and-guns that you'll find on the Amiga, delivering sensational visuals, a stunning score and hectic gameplay. The five worlds are huge in scope, while it features some truly gigantic bosses and a satisfying array of weapons to run amok with. It appeared on consoles, albeit greatly cut down, as a movie tie-in for *Universal Soldier*.



» [Amiga] The name '*Turrican*' comes from 'Turricano', a surname plucked out of developer Manfred Trenz's phone book.

» [Amiga] Don't be fooled by the sedentary appearance of this screenshot, *Super Cars II* is a pleasingly fast-paced game.

TREMENDOUS TOP-DOWN FUN
SUPER CARS II

1991 • MAGNETIC FIELDS

The Amiga excelled when it came to top-down racers, but this is easily our favourite out of the many that are available. Magnetic Fields' sequel builds on the original with a great array of entertaining weapons, and adds a much-needed and brilliant split-screen two-player mode. Graphically, it's been enhanced too, making it one of the slickest-looking racers on the system. It features great music by Barry Leitch as well.

ROAD TO VICTORY
THE SETTLERS

1993 • BLUE BYTE

This excellent strategy game has you building mediaeval settlements and fighting off an aggressive AI opponent. Like in *Sim City* (which just missed inclusion in this book), the key placement of buildings and road networks is crucial to the efficiency of your settlement. *The Settlers* stands apart, however, thanks to its military element, allowing you to capture more territory. The series was rebooted in 2023 with *The Settlers: New Allies*.

» [Amiga] Knowing when to build in *The Settlers* is just as important as knowing what to build.

A REVOLUTIONARY ADVENTURE
BENEATH A STEEL SKY

1994 • REVOLUTION SOFTWARE

» [Amiga] Before he worked on *Steel Sky*, Dave Gibbons was the artist behind *Watchmen*.

Before it found worldwide success with *Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars*, Revolution Software created this gem of a point-and-click adventure. Charles Cecil teamed up with acclaimed comic-book artist Dave Gibbons to create his dystopian take on Australia, and made great use of dialogue trees to enhance *Steel Sky*'s interesting characters and bleak atmosphere. Be warned, though: Cecil's epic vision requires an eye-watering 15 disks. That's a lot of disk swapping!

» [Amiga] Harvesting the Spice while your men scout out the area. Watch out for Harkonnens!

BCC: BEFORE COMMAND & CONQUER
DUNE II

1993 • WESTWOOD STUDIOS

Although *Dune II* certainly wasn't the first real-time strategy game, it absolutely helped popularise the genre and laid the building blocks for the later *Command & Conquer*, which was also by Westwood. Initially you simply spend your time on Arrakis harvesting the coveted Spice while fighting off the odd skirmish. Once the other Houses arrive you then start using your Spice-powered army to capture your opponents, hopefully turning the ongoing war in your favour.

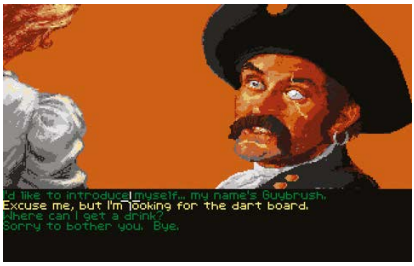
AN ABSURD ADVENTURE

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

1990 • LUCASFILM GAMES

Guybrush Threepwood's quest to become a mighty pirate resulted in one of Lucasfilm's most beloved games and it's arguably one of the greatest point-and-click adventures ever made. It makes the most of the SCUMM engine, is far funnier than *Manic Mansion* and is filled with delightful characters, including one of the smarmiest salesmen you're ever likely to meet in a game. It was succeeded by the far superior *Monkey Island 2*, but the large number of disks that game required (11 to the original's four) means we're sticking with Guybrush's original adventure.

» [Amiga] Guybrush finds himself in the infamous SCUMM bar.



» [Amiga] Why ask a sensible question when you could ask a silly one?

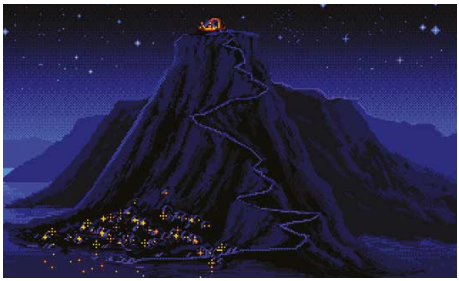
MONKEY MAGIC

RON GILBERT ON CREATING THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

What was *Monkey Island* inspired by?
"I have a love of pirates, mostly driven by the Disney ride Pirates Of The Caribbean. I also wanted to make a game that was kind of like fantasy, because it was popular, but I am not a huge fantasy fan. Pirates seemed like a good compromise."

Where you happy with the game's look?
"If we had better hardware to do graphics, they would have looked better. But that lack of high-end graphics really causes you to focus on the game and story more."

How did the insult sword fighting come about?
"I was inspired a lot by movies. I love movies and back then I would go to the theatre several times a week. When I am designing, I also spend a lot of time driving and listening to music. When designing *Monkey Island*, I watched a lot of old pirate movies, and they always spent more time in a sword fight talking to each other than actually fighting. So I figured that would be an interesting gameplay system. Also, if you're going to do a pirate game, there has to be sword fighting, but back then adventure games players hated any action in their games, so doing this turned it into a (funny) puzzle.



Why is it so hard to kill Guybrush?
"I got sick of playing (especially the Sierra) adventure games where you died any time you did anything wrong. I felt like this was a cheap way out for the designer."

How did the game's script evolve?
"We wrote the script as we were doing the programming. You could not do that today. You'd need to start with a script."

Why did you never make a third game at the time?
"I felt that I had grown to the point where I wanted to run my own company, so I started Humongous Entertainment and we made adventures and other games for kids."

BRABEN'S AMBITIOUS SEQUEL

FRONTIER: ELITE II

1993 • DAVID BRABEN

David Braben's bold space trading sequel saw him jettisoning *Elite* co-creator Ian Bell and shooting for the stars on his own.

The original game was the first to feature procedurally generated star systems, and *Frontier* did the same with textures and terrain. It offers unparalleled player freedom, too, thanks to its open-ended structure and lack of pre-scripted missions. A sequel followed in 1995, but was unfortunately riddled with bugs.

» [Amiga] *Frontier*'s filled polygons were a world away from the wireframe look of *Elite*.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

DAVID BRABEN ON CRAFTING FRONTIER: ELITE II

Why choose the Amiga?

"I started on the BBC Micro but quickly moved to the Amiga, writing in native 68000 assembler. Writing on the BBC Micro would have meant easy porting to the 6502-based machines like the C64, NES, and Apple II, but even by then in 1985, the 8-bit machines were being superseded by their 16-bit replacements. I could do so much more. I wanted to set it in a model of our own galaxy, and make it feel as real a rendition of the far future as I could, so I dropped the early 8-bit *Elite II* work, and moved wholly to 16-bit."

How did *Frontier* improve on *Elite*'s procedural generation formula?

"It used a similar approach, but used much stricter rules based on empirical observation of planet formation. Every time it interrogates the galaxy 'database' it regenerates the data it needs rather than storing it. There is a big list of real-life data (like Earth, and the stars in the night sky) and the system fills in the rest."

Why include an 82-page novella with *Frontier*?

"I wanted the player to feel a small and relatively insignificant part of a giant galaxy, simply trying to make their way. That felt more real to me than every player being the superhero. I liked the idea of a galaxy that was largely dysfunctional but somehow blunders along, not unlike our own world today."

Why does *Frontier* contain so much classical music?

"I didn't want something that would immediately date, hence the choice of classical music, but I also wanted it to evoke the feeling of epic grandeur."

How has the *Elite* series evolved since *Frontier*?

"*Elite Dangerous* has taken the baton and moved on still further. It takes the level of detail and sophistication of the simulation to a much higher level, including the simulation technology, even to the extent it has included star systems in the simulation before they were discovered."

» [Amiga] The crowd get ready for a setpiece, but will the ball end up going in?

SENSIBLE'S STRIKING SEQUEL

SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER '95/'96 EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

1995 • SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

In all fairness, the Amiga isn't short of great football games, but you'll only find one of them included in our definitive list of Amiga greats. While the original *Sensible Soccer* remains an excellent footy game, it can't hold a candle to the superior sequels that Sensible Software knocked out in later years. We've chosen the European Championship update as our version of choice, as it not only has greatly improved updates of the numerous gameplay elements of the earlier games in the series, but features better menus as well. It's otherwise the same fantastic game that you know and love, but with greatly refined mechanics and useful additions like star ratings for players and stronger, more challenging AI. It's perhaps the Career Mode that remains *Sensible World Of Soccer*'s highlight though, allowing you to manage your team of plucky players through 20 gruelling seasons. Even today, it remains one of the most enjoyable football games around.

SHOOTING FOR SUCCESS

SENSIBLE SOFTWARE'S JON HARE ON UPPING THE FOOTBALL STAKES WITH SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER

How did *SWOS* originate?

"After *Sensible Soccer* came out in 1992, we didn't stop working on it. Our programmer, Chris Chapman, ensured the development process was never broken. So as he carried on working, we were able to inject more features and work on a game that really would become the ultimate football game, in our eyes at least. That's how *Sensible World Of Soccer* came into being."

Why were there so many clubs and players?

"We were very thorough, and that is because of the roots, which go back to Subbuteo. That game was international and it had different kits. You had all the different international teams and I think *SWOS* was an ideal way of just turning our game into a modern Subbuteo on a computer, not in the sense of flicking players around but playing football as realistically as possible, given the constraints. I think that that was probably part of it. Personally, I'm quite attracted to things that are about the world and different countries, and how that works, and it was nice to map the football world out of the game."

Why add the player management element?

"What we wanted with the management part was a change to buying players and selling them so that whatever team you were – whether Rochdale, Aldershot or whatever – then you'd be able to buy players and stick them in your team and see what happened. It was fun to have that ability and buy a player from, say, Venezuela and see if he worked."

Why did you not massively overhaul the original game engine?

"Chris always said he didn't quite know how we'd gotten to that point of getting a good engine but he didn't want to mess it up, so we were always quite careful to not play around with our magic formula too much. There was more focus on interfacing the tactics properly with the gameplay so it was well balanced and also well balanced on the AI. The strategy, the AI, and the controls were a triangle and we had to make sure they all balanced with each other."

A JAW-DROPPING WORLD

CARRIER COMMAND

1988 • RAINBIRD

With its astonishing 3D visuals and state-of-the-art game mechanics, *Carrier Command* caused many a dropped jaw when it launched in 1988. Effectively two games in one thanks to its Strategy and Action modes, *Carrier Command* allows you to commandeer a gigantic robotic aircraft carrier and complete a variety of challenging missions in order to defeat a deadly terrorist threat. It's notable for having an incredibly slick icon-driven UI and an immense playing area to explore.

» [Amiga] There's a lot to pay attention to in *Carrier Command*, as you can see here – this interface is detailed, but works brilliantly.

» [Amiga] Graftgold's colourful conversion is brilliant fun, highlighting just how well arcade games could be converted to the Amiga.

WHO NEEDS BUBBLES?

RAINBOW ISLANDS

1990 • GRAFTGOLD

Virtually every Graftgold conversion of *Rainbow Islands* is superb, but the Amiga offering is easily the best (aside from Graftgold's much later 32-bit console versions). This stunning conversion features virtually every aspect of the rainbow-flinging platformer, boasts extremely authentic visuals and has some wonderfully tight controls. It also does a rather brilliant job of converting the arcade game's impressively complex scoring system and has a delightfully chipper soundtrack.

SID MEIER GOES TO SPACE

CIVILIZATION

1991 • MICROPROSE

Sid Meier's outrageously epic strategy game sees you playing across time itself. *Civilization* lets you create vast empires across a series of important time periods in an attempt to win the great space race. It's certainly not the most accessible of the games that you'll find within this book, but it's arguably the Amiga's best example of the genre and absolutely needs to be experienced.

» [Amiga] It may be a slow burner, but *Civilization* will eventually hook you.

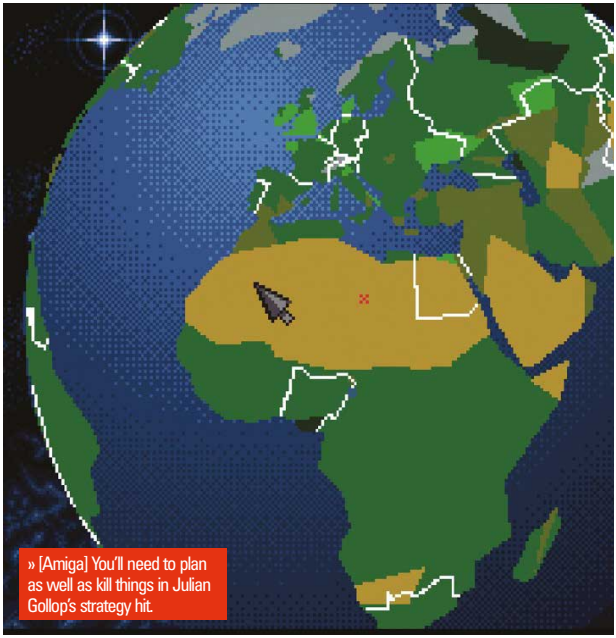
DOUBLE THE THRILLS AND SPILLS

THE CHAOS ENGINE

1993 • THE BITMAP BROTHERS

This excellent top-down shooter is known in the United States as *Soldiers Of Fortune*. Spread across four gigantic worlds, it's designed for two players (with the computer controlling the AI in a single-player game) and has you seeking out keys while mowing down a never-ending supply of enemies. A sequel arrived in 1996, which removed the co-operative aspect to focus on intense deathmatch-style play instead.

» [Amiga] The co-operative aspect of *The Chaos Engine* was great fun, so it's a shame it was dropped for the sequel.



» [Amiga] You'll need to plan as well as kill things in Julian Gollop's strategy hit.

WHEN ALIENS EVOLVE

UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN

1994 • MYTHOS GAMES

This thoroughly absorbing strategy game from Julian Gollop explains why he's one of the masters of the genre. *Enemy Unknown* subtly builds on all the mechanics Gollop introduced in his earlier 8-bit gems like *Rebelstar* and *Laser Squad* and offers a staggering amount of depth in its combat. It's admittedly far superior on later Amiga systems, but we couldn't bear to leave it off our list. A true classic.

THE MINI AMIGA 500 COMPANION

retro GAMER

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